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Power Flows to Rap Flows: Power Dynamics within the Cultural Sphere of Putin's Russia

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Power Flows to Rap Flows: Power Dynamics within the Cultural Sphere of Putin's Russia

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Dedication

To my grandmother, Louise Jetton,

for always believing in me and my dreams.

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Abstract

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In the weeks after *Novaya Gazeta* published a petition retaliating against the Russian government's annexation of Crimea in early 2014, cultural leaders who had signed this petition began to find themselves labelled across the majority of Russian media as "Nazi sympathizers" and "traitors." As these slanders in the media worsened, venues all over Russia began to cancel these same artists' public appearances. This phenomenon of apparent repression that swept throughout Russia following the publication of this anti-intervention petition is what I term the "blacklist effect." In the same way that a blacklist denies those whose names appear on it access to services, recognition, work, or other privileges depending on the context, these Russian artists who oppose Russian military intervention in Ukraine are repeatedly and systematically barred from appearing publicly before large crowds, painted as "traitors" by the majority of Russian press, and as a consequence are ostracized from large swathes of Russian society, especially amongst those who support the government and its foreign policy. This study provides a detailed analysis of the "blacklist effect" using Russian hip-hop as a case study, relates the "blacklist effect" to Russian President Vladimir Putin's use of soft power, and considers the consequences of this pattern of repression for the future of Russia.

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Chapter 1: The Dynamics of Power

In the weeks following his performance at a music festival in Lviv, Ukraine, popular Russian hip-hop artist Ivan Alekseev, better known by his stage name Noize MC, received calls from venue owners cancelling sixty percent of his upcoming Russian tour, including almost every scheduled show for Siberia and Russia's Far East (Demirjian 2014b). According to Alekseev, most of the venue owners who cancelled his live shows did so under pressure from authorities (Polunchukova 2015). Federal drug officials and bomb squads raided many of the venues that did not cancel on the young artist responding to alleged tips of criminal activity. In an interview with *The Washington Post,* Alekseev attempted to relate these incidents in terms that an American audience would understand, "It was [like] if you were doing a three-day tour of gigs in Ohio and you have guys from the CIA, FBI and local police coming and telling you to go [to vacate the venue]" (Demirjian 2014b). As Alekseev's choice of words seems to exemplify, this show of force against the young rapper is unjustifiably massive; extends to all levels of authority, from local to international Russian security forces; and follows the performer to all parts of the country, even provinces far-removed from the nation's capital.

The explanation for this concert's far-reaching effects revolves around the location and political climate where this music festival occurred. The music festival in Lviv took place in August 2014, a time when Ukrainian officials were openly accusing Russia of sending troops and aid to rebels fighting a separatist war in Eastern Ukraine. Many of the Russian headliners scheduled to perform concerts at the festival pulled out

prior to its scheduled opening day. Andreev was one of the few big-name Russian acts to remain in the festival's lineup. During Andreev's set in Lviv, he performed his song "Tanzy," his remixed cover of a Ukrainian song by Vopli Vidoplyasova that the young rapper has been performing since 2012. While Noize MC rapped in Ukrainian, he accepted a Ukrainian flag offered to him by a young female fan and proceeded to wear it for the remainder of the song (Demirjian 2014b). Just as revolutionary female rocker Zemfira would learn nearly a year later after performing a similar act at her concert in Tblisi, Georgia (Republic 2015), the Kremlin will not tolerate Russian musicians hoisting the Ukrainian flag.[1] Once photos of this concert surfaced in Russia, the concert cancellations and police raids began. By accepting the Ukrainian flag and voicing his support for Ukraine in the current conflict, Noize MC demonstrated to the government of Russia that he would not comply with their whitewashing of all discussion of Crimea and Ukraine that they had perpetuated for months through state media. Unlike themes of governmental and police corruption, which the young artist has grappled with in the past, supporting Ukraine's position in the war between Russia and Ukraine sparked fierce backlash from authorities. This thesis sheds light on why the current Russian government

[1] It is important to define the terms that I will use throughout this thesis to describe Russian leadership. I will use the term "Kremlin" to refer to President Vladimir Putin and his closest advisors. For the terms "regime," "state," "government," and "country," I provide a textbook definition from *Essentials of Comparative Politics*:
"In comparative politics, the state is a series of institutions that maintains a monopoly of violence over a territory. It relies on sovereignty–the ability to carry out actions in a territory independently–and power. A regime is the rules and norms of politics; in some nondemocratic countries where politics is dominated by a single individual, we may use the term *regime* to refer to that leader. Government is the leader in charge of running the state. If the state is a computer, the regime is the software and the government is the operator.
A country may be seen as shorthand for all these concepts – state, government, regime – as well as for the people who live within a political system" (ONeil 2011).

of Russian President Vladimir Putin will allow no dissent on the issue of Ukraine and how this stance affects the cultural sphere of Russian society.

While the situation has improved somewhat for Noize MC, the young musician continues to face difficulties scheduling concerts in Russia (Becedovala 2015). This lack of booking has caused the young rapper to lose funds that could be used to support his family of wife and two sons (Malakhova and Gasparyan 2014; TV Dozhd 2015). In an interview conducted in early 2015 prior to Putin's yearly call-in show *Direct Line*, where audience members call the show and present their questions to the president, a journalist asked the young rapper what he would ask Putin if given the chance. Andreev immediately replied, "To Vladimir I have one important question: How long [must this continue]?" (Polunchukova 2015).

DEFINING POWER

Before I delve into the specifics of this current wave of repression perpetuated by the Putin regime in contemporary Russia, it is important to first address the fundamental concepts with which research on this topic must grapple. At its core, this research deals with power and a few of the innumerable ways power can manifest itself in the modern world, specifically in the realm of culture. Since this work intends to address power, it follows that power should be the first term that requires a definition. Popular definitions of power include the ability to produce an effect or the ability to influence others. When the term is used in reference to politics, it is often connected to the sovereignty of a

nation or when applied to a person, that person possessing an office or position in which they can invoke this ability to influence others. In fact, politics and power have long been thought to be synonymous. Karl Deutsch defined political relations as power relations. In his words, "Politics, then, is the interplay of enforcement threats which can be changed fairly quickly, with the existing loyalties and compliance habits of the population" (Deutsch 1967, 234). While such definitions seem straightforward, a sizable literature on the subject of power has developed in recent decades with scholars around the world debating the definition of power and its functions following new scholarship seeking to update and innovate our idea of what power means and how it functions.

International relations, the realm of scholarship where the definition of power is most fiercely contested today, has traditionally situated power within the domain of realism. Felix Berenskoetter and M.J. Williams wrote a comprehensive overview of the schools of thought on power within social and political theory in their 2007 work "Thinking About Power." This article was most useful in informing my conception of power as well as leading me to the necessary sources to read in forming my thoughts on the topic. However, as I seek to establish only the framework for my own discussion on power within the cultural sphere of contemporary Russia, I will not relate all of the nuances of Berenskoetter's argument or entire framework here, instead only invoking the parts necessary in framing my work on Putin's cultural policy.

One of the most influential writers on power, whose work Berenskoetter references frequently, is that of Max Weber. Berenskoetter translates Weber's definition

of power from his work *Economy and Society* as "the opportunity to have one's will prevail within a social relationship (…) no matter what this opportunity is based on." As Berenskoetter notes, this definition poses power as something that exists within a relationship—to identify power, the relationship in which the power may be invoked must first be identified (Berenskoetter and Williams 2013, 4).

Although this definition aligns with our previous definition of power being the ability to influence others, one major point of contention is the amount of volition that the subject who is being influenced has within the relationship. Political scientist Robert Dahl defined power as "*A* has power over *B* to the extent that he can get *B* to do something that *B* would not otherwise do" (Dahl 1957, 202-203). While Dahl was not groundbreaking in his conception of power in this regard, his contribution to studies on power was demonstrating to many scholars power as a zero-sum game through his analyses on decisions among parties who hold conflicting preferences (Berenskoetter and Williams 2013, 6).[2]

However, others believe that what Dahl showed was power was only zero-sum in a limited number of contexts. Joseph Nye Jr., one of the most renowned political scientists living today and the developer of the concept of "soft power" which will be used throughout this thesis cited Dahl when he referenced people who conceptualize power in terms of command and coercion (Nye 2009b, 2). However, as David Baldwin

[2] The term "zero-sum" in this context is used to denote a relationship in which there is a finite amount of resources (in this case power) and every loss or gain by one actor in the relationship equals an opposite and proportional loss or gain to a different actor (or actors). In the context of power, one person's loss of power equals another person(s) gain of the same amount of power. All gains and losses, if quantified, within the relationship will add up to zero (hence the name zero-sum).

states, "Although Dahl's concept of power *can* describe situations in which *A* gains power and *B* loses power, it can also describe situations in which each gains power with respect to the other." (Baldwin 2016, 40). Using Baldwin's example of a married couple, Dahl's conception of power can actually be used to show that when two people marry, they often gain power in respect to the other depending on the scope (aspects of behavior) between the two actors in the relationship:

> Different scopes: "I will do the dishes if (and only if) you will take out the garbage."
> Similar scopes: "I will attend the Parent-Teacher Association meeting only if you come too" (Baldwin 2016, 39).

As this example shows, power is not always zero-sum. In other words, two actors within a relationship can concurrently gain influence over the other without power being lost; to understand who wields power, you must identify the relationship within which the power exists, the scope of the relationship (understanding what the parties would or would not do if power was not applied), and what the desires of each party are.

This Dahlian conception of power is only applicable to power within relationships in which one party seeks to dominate the other, where *A* exerts their will to get *B* to do what *B* would not otherwise do. However, as Berenskoetter points out, there are other situations that involve power that do not fit this model such as his "second dimension of power," limiting alternatives. He cites Bachrach and Baratz who contended that Dahl's definition of power does not take into account "why some alternatives are not part of the debate and consequently, who has the authority to exclude issues from the discussion" (Berenskoetter and Williams 2013, 8). Bachrach and Baratz emphasized that some actors

in power relationships have the power "to create or reinforce barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts" (Bachrach and Baratz 1970, 8). This conception of power has often been cited as a person's ability to affect or change the "rules of the game"— if options are never available in the power relationship, *A* never has to force *B* to do what *B* would not otherwise do as *B* is never presented with more favorable alternative options.

For example, let us imagine our married couple from Baldwin's example on differing scopes of power. Let us say that spouse *A* receives a small, unexpected bonus on their monthly salary, but does not inform their partner, spouse *B,* of their extra income. Instead of telling *B* of *A*'s extra income and getting *B*'s input (and thereby their power influence) on what the money should be spent on, *A* chooses to treat themselves to a meal for one at a very expensive restaurant about which *B* will likely never learn. Upon their return home, *A* offers *B* to give their input on deciding what should be done with the money left over from the bonus, acting as if the current amount were the full bonus received and they had not selfishly dined alone at the expensive restaurant. In this way, *A* has asserted power within the relationship by limiting *B*'s options through concealment of information and subsequent limiting of available resources.

This second dimension of power limiting alternatives is particularly important in examining Russian cultural elites. In his book *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives*, Eric Gordy dissects the multitude of ways that Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic exerted power using this second dimension in various cultural and social spheres. Although the political and social

climates of Milosevic's Serbia and Putin's Russia are not identical, both regimes exert(ed) power by limiting alternatives.

Gordy's chapter titled "The Destruction of Musical Alternatives" examines the suffocation of Serbian rock and its supplantation with less authentic forms of music that praised the regime and did not seek to challenge the status quo in the way that authentic rock did: "[s]ome former rock and roll stars (…) who supported nationalist mobilization, moved into full-time political agitation in the service of the regime and its clients—preserving their access to publicity in state-controlled media." Gordy writes, "[f]avor was available from above for rockers who were inclined to throw their lot in with the regime" (Gordy 1999, 123). By defining what was and was not permissible within Serbian society, Milosevic limited alternatives and exerted power.

Although the Milosevic regime was not as successful in using music to legitimize his power as he was in other aspects of Serbian life, leaving the regime in Gordy's words "discredited and embarrassed" (Gordy 1999, 200), this thesis will examine this strategy's success in Putin's Russia. Unlike the case of the nationalist "former rockers" and turbo-folk performers that the Milosevic regime supported in Serbia, many of the musical acts that convey nationalist, pro-regime messages in Russia are extremely popular. In this case, the act of the regime limiting alternatives is not as blatantly obvious as many listeners still enjoy what they are listening to. In Gordy's conclusions, he states that the primary actors who can resist the state's control over all aspects of daily life are underground musicians and independent journalists (Gordy 1999, 200). Although he

never cites Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, Gordy's conclusion is similar to Gramsci's idea of a "war of position" being able to create alternatives that could challenge the cultural hegemony of the state.

In Gramsci's view, the state maintains power by dominating a culturally diverse society through manipulation of its institutions and cultural leaders. This domination is known as "cultural hegemony." Those societal leaders who do not consent to the state's domination are punished using institutions that the state has at its disposal, such as: the police, the courts, and taxes. Gramsci envisioned two ways to challenge the state: a "war of position" and a "war of manoeuvre." A "war of manoeuvre" is a head-on, violent collision with the state that is better reserved for less-developed "primordial and gelatinous" civil societies such as 1917's Russia (Schwarzmantel 2014, 205). A "war of position," on the other hand, is a war waged in civil society itself by creating an alternative culture that challenges the state's domination of the realm of culture. This type of war is more suited for more-developed civil societies (for a recent abridged version of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* with explanations of Gramsci's ideas see: John Schwarzmantel's *The Routledge Guidebook to Gramsci's Prison Notebooks* (2014)).

This "war of position" of Gramsci's that Gordy seems to be suggest is likely to be more successful in a state such as Serbia which limits alternatives but does not provide cultural products that can fill the void of the suppressed originals. This is where the cultural arenas of Milosevic's Serbia and Putin's Russia diverge. Where turbo-folk's ridiculous nature broadcast to all listeners the understanding that authentic Serbian music

was being suppressed, Putin's Russia offers satisfying alternatives that mask the repression of anti-Putin musical artists. Unlike in Serbia where very few enjoyed the music broadcast on the radio, because the people of Russia still have entertaining and enjoyable music to listen to, the repression of musicians who support Ukraine is not as noticeable.

The final dimension of power as described by Berenskoetter is the ability of an actor to shape norms (Berenskoetter and Williams 2013, 11). Similar to Gramsci's cultural hegemony, this dimension seeks to address power relationships in which the parties' interests are not at odds with one another, where there is not *conflict,* but *consensus*. Although Putin uses all three dimensions of power, these final two dimensions that which this work most focuses. Milosevic held on to power in part by limiting alternatives. In music, he limited alternatives in popular Serbian rock that criticized the regime, while offering unsatisfying alternatives in washed-up rock acts and ridiculous turbo-folk artists singing vapid lyrics that either praised the regime or avoided politics altogether.

Like Milosevic, Putin offers the people one choice. However, unlike Milosevic, Putin's offer is one that they willingly accept. Although in the context of music this means creating a musical elite who either praise their president or avoid the topic, Putin's limiting of alternatives is ubiquitous throughout Russian society. When comparing the present situation in Russia to Gramsci's view of cultural hegemony, the two are eerily similar. Putin cannot envision a Russia without him and through years of media

manipulation and enforcing consensus around a constructed Russian-centric worldview, neither can the Russian people. The particular strategies Putin uses to enforce consensus as well as a thorough look at Russian media will be included in the next chapter. In speaking about power relationships in which consensus is formed I will now turn to Joseph Nye's discussion of power as belonging to distinct categories: hard, soft, and smart.

HARD, SOFT, AND SMART POWER

It was during the Cold War's final days when Joseph Nye, then the director of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University, introduced the concept of soft power in his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. In an article for *Foreign Policy* simply titled "Soft Power," Nye claimed that with the decline of a Soviet threat that had for half of a century provided a source of comparison for Americans to define their place of power in the world, Americans needed a new way to conceptualize power (Nye 1990, 153). He noted that where a nation's power had traditionally been its strength in war or its amount of resources, a host of new factors such as technology, education, and economic growth had become more significant when determining a country's international power (Nye 1990, 154). Because the amount of resources and strength in war were no longer enough to define a nation's international power due to the changing multipolar nature of the international system, Nye, referencing the dictionary definition of power claims, "[p]roof of power lies not in resources but in the ability to change the behavior of states" (Nye 1990, 155). No longer can a nation's

number of nuclear bombs or GDP solidify its status as a world power—instead, nation *A*'s power status is defined by its ability to get nation *B* (and *C*, *D*, and *E*) to do what nation *A* desires, a definition strikingly similar to the Dahlian one on its surface.

Due to military force becoming more costly to use and the great difficulty of making unilateral moves on the international scene, the world has become much more interdependent and states use this interdependence to achieve their objectives (Nye 1990, 157-158). Because the world is multipolar, interdependent, and there exist a multitude of different power spheres (economic, military, technological), states are able to influence outcomes across spheres—for example a nation with a strong economy could use their economic power to influence another actor's military campaign. The spheres are no longer nearly as well-defined as in the past, and small nations or even non-state transnational actors can influence actions on the international system like never before. This influence is often exerted in ways that were not as often invoked in the past when nations used traditional power sources to accomplish their objectives. Like Dahl, Nye relates power in terms of a relationship between lovers, "just as two lovers may manipulate the other, the less vulnerable of two states may use subtle threats to their relationship as a source of power" (Nye 1990, 158). The use of threats is what Nye would define as a tool of "hard power."

Nye would later in his book *Soft Power* compare hard power to the use of "carrots" and "sticks;" the ability to influence others to change their position through inducements (carrots) or threats (sticks) (Nye 2009b, 5). Using hard power is to use

payment or coercion to get others to do what you want them to do (Nye 2009a). Hard power is a concept that even a young child can understand. Throughout my early childhood, I was often convinced to do things that I did not want to do (namely rake the yard and clean my room) through payment (weekly allowance) and coercion (threats of time-out or limiting TV time).

Where hard power used to be the primary way that actors achieved their objectives, with the international system becoming multipolar and as such no one state being able to exert ultimate dominance, "soft power" has become an increasingly important factor in the international system. In Nye's words," [a] country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries—admiring its values, emulating its examples, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness—want to follow it" (Nye 2009b, 5). Once again reverting to relating international relationships to marital ones, Nye states, "[i]n a relationship or a marriage, power does not necessarily reside with the larger partner, but in the mysterious chemistry of attraction" (Nye 2009b, 5). But what makes a country "attractive" and what can a leader do to make their country more so? Nye has defined the constituent parts of a country's soft power to be: "its culture (when it is pleasing others), its values (when they are attractive and consistently practiced), and its politics (when they are seen as inclusive and legitimate)" (Nye 2009a). Here, Nye's definition of power diverges from Dahl's. Although hard power can be invoked by *A* to force *B* to do something *B* would not otherwise do, soft power encompasses "the other facets of power that are used to persuade others to do what is in

fact in their best interests" (Nye 2009a). As the exertion of hard power is often more quantifiable through troop numbers or amount of currency and the tools of soft power are not as concrete and therefore difficult to detect and gauge, it took the massive power vacuum that the dissolution of the Soviet Union caused for political scientists to recognize and examine the distinction and unique functions of hard and soft power.

All nations have instruments of both soft and hard power, but the effectiveness of these instruments differ widely from state to state. The combination of a nation's hard and soft power is what Nye refers to as "smart power." Many world leaders are calling for a strengthening of their nations' smart power, often by strengthening their soft power tools and integrating them better into their hard power capabilities (Nye 2011 p. ix). The next section will discuss how a nation goes about achieving these aims.

CULTURE—THE KEY TO SMART POWER

If the elements that comprise soft power are difficult to observe and even more difficult to gauge, how does a leader cultivate this crucial half of smart power? Many of the measurements that Nye and other political scientists use to evaluate a nation's soft power stem from the cultural influence that nation has throughout the world. When attempting to exemplify the immense soft power reservoir of the United States, Nye cites a list of statistics that include the great number of immigrants the United States attracts, the massive number of international students that study at American universities, the dominance of Hollywood and the American music industry on international markets, and our rankings for Nobel Prize laureates in hard sciences and literature (Nye 2009b, 33-34).

People around the world are attracted by the United States due to our values, institutions, policies, and as this list shows, our culture. These elements make up the currency of soft power (Nye 2009b, 31). Although components of soft power may make it appear more abstract and less obviously useful to a nation than an instrument of hard power, it must be remembered that soft power is the power to attract. This power often leads to acquiescence (Nye 2009b, 6).

The Cold War between the US-led NATO Alliance and the Soviet-dominated Eastern Bloc was more than just an arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. A brief glance at how culture and ultimately soft power played a crucial role in the development of the global war of ideologies (even before the concept of soft power was defined by Nye) will serve to both demonstrate how soft power functions as well as providing historical background for my analysis of modern Russia's soft power in the following section.

Most scholars of Eastern Europe agree that by the late 1980s, the Soviet economy had been deteriorating for decades situated on top of a crumbling and inefficient infrastructure. Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms caused a shock to the Soviet system from which it could not recover. In his book *Why Did the Soviet Union Collapse?* (1998) Robert Strayer states, "Among the most consequential and bitter disappointments of the Gorbachev reform program was its almost total economic failure. That failure was rooted in the long-term imbalances and irrationalities of the Soviet economy." However, as stated before, it was the shock of the reforms themselves that ultimately pushed the

Soviet economy past the brink of no return. Strayer writes, “it was perestroika, the attempted cure, that turned mere stagnation into outright decline” (Strayer n.d., 133).

While economic decline was one of the most visible contributors to the fall of the USSR, much of the Soviet Union’s dissolution can be attributed to its failure to attract other countries to their cause. Because the United States was much more successful in making their cause attractive to powerful nations around the world through their use of soft power as well as accumulation of resources, America was able to play a crucial role in designing and developing international institutions such as the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank by which the modern global system is run. As the great number of cultural assets the United States listed at the beginning of this section shows, much of the country’s soft power comes not from government-initiated actions to make America more attractive, but instead by the United States’ well-developed civil society. The United States has, for the most part, allowed for an uncensored civil society that is allowed to criticize its government. This ability for Americans to denounce their own government such as during the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War allows the United States to maintain its soft power even when the actions of the country are unpopular abroad (Nye 2014). (Nye 2009b, 6).

This is the key difference between American and Soviet culture of the Cold War period. Where the Soviet Union’s achievements in science, such as its launching Sputnik and its development of a powerful nuclear weapons program, were respected worldwide, the same cannot be said for Soviet culture. The Soviets battled with America on a global

scale, attempting to make their Communist system appear more attractive than U.S. capitalism (Nye 2009b, 73). A wide array of titles such as Penny Von Eschen's *Satchmo Blows Up the World* and Naima Prevots' *Dance for Export* have examined Cold War cultural diplomacy projects from both the Americans and the Soviets and their attempts to neutralize the opposing power's attempts at making their culture more attractive internationally. Von Eschen's shows the hypocrisy of the U.S. State Department sending African-American "jambassadors" to represent their country while incidents such as the Birmingham race riots were occurring domestically. However, because the jazz musicians were not censored, they were able to voice their opposition freely, a freedom that Soviet ballet dancers of the Bolshoi did not enjoy (Eschen 2006; Prevots 1998).

Although the USSR pumped billions into their public diplomacy programs and were successful in winning gold medals in the Olympics and exporting their dance troupes throughout the world, they were never successful in achieving the same level (or even comparable levels) of international mass appeal for their cultural products (Nye 2009b, 73-74). As opposed to America that allowed the production and consumption of popular culture to go more or less uninhibited, the Soviet government was much more careful on what they allowed to be imported and exported in terms of culture. As Nye himself comments, "The closed nature of the Soviet system and its constant efforts to exclude bourgeois cultural influences meant that the Soviet Union ceded the battle for mass culture, never competing with American global influence in film, television, or popular music" (Nye 2009b, 74). Due to Soviet leaders' tight grip on their nation's civil

society and their tendency to silence any voice that offered opposition to the regime, the USSR was never successful in making their culture seem as attractive as America's, limiting Soviet soft power. The Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 conducted in order to crush protest movements in these locations squandered what little soft power the defeat of fascism in World War II had afforded them (Nye 2014). This legacy of limited soft power is one that continues in today's modern Russia and is detailed in the following section.

RUSSIA'S SMART POWER

A country can influence others in order to advance their interests through three main ways: payment, coercion, and attraction (Nye 2014). In December 2014, the same month that Russia's current cultural policy (discussed in detail in the next chapter) was signed by Putin and passed into law, Nye wrote an article entitled "Putin's Rules of Attraction." In this article, Nye notes how due to the limits on Russian soft power caused by decades of rampant corruption, crime, and unpopular wars in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Georgia, and most recently Ukraine, Russia has backed itself into a corner in terms of the tools they have available (Nye 2014).

While payment had been a viable method of influencing other countries through a booming energy sector beginning in the early 2000s, a recent slump in oil prices has led the Russian economy to suffer in recent years. Putin has tried a second method, coercion, and while he has been successful in annexing Crimea and garnering closer ties with Georgia's breakaway republic, Abkhazia, there have been some serious repercussions

including increasingly harsh Western-led sanctions and ostracizing Russia from the international community (Nye 2014).

Putin is left with two alternatives: coercion and attraction. World powers often work to maintain the status quo of power in the world. A rising power such as the one Russia wishes to envision itself could benefit greatly by invoking soft power. For example, America was the leading economic power in the world after the Second World War, controlling around a third of the world's GDP as well as being the sole possessor of nuclear weapons. However, because its policies were acclaimed internationally and generally seen as working for the good of the global community, countries of the world did not form coalitions to impede the United States' rise (Nye 2009b, 39). For the past decade, China has been working to cultivate a less-threatening image as it continues to become a greater military and economic power (Nye 2014). Russia, however, lacks the base on which to build soft power. Due to the view emphasized by the Russian government that the West is trying to keep Russia from "rising from its knees," since Putin's second term, it has adopted a foreign policy that emphasizes its hard power in maintaining a sphere of influence in the post-Soviet zone.

This emphasis on hard power is precisely what puts Putin's Russia in such a difficult position today. As Russian political scientist Sergei Karaganov wrote in 2009, Russia's lack of soft power has forced it to rely on its hard power, specifically its resource wealth (Karaganov 2009). With a 2017 Russia that lacks the same comparative wealth of 2009, Putin's position has become increasingly desperate, forcing the current

president to tap into the deep-seated nationalism and xenophobia cultivated throughout the Soviet era. A complete analysis of the current Russian president's strategies to maintain his popular ratings and control on power will be given in the following chapter.

One of the strategies Putin has used to bolster his domestic approval ratings has been silencing dissent in the cultural sphere through the implementation of a cultural policy that aims to limit multiculturalism in favor of a unified Russian culture (Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation 2014b). In the case of Russia, more so than almost any other nation in the world, the president's domestic and foreign successes are inextricably linked—with the Russian economy in the doldrums with no end in sight, Putin's popularity rating relies on his ability to convince his nation that their current suffering is not the fault of the Russian state, but of the enemies of Russia. This is a narrative of surprising vitality and has served to bolster Putin's approval ratings since the annexation of Crimea in March 2014. This, too, can be attributed to soft power, albeit negative soft power.

Although soft power is typically described as a foreign policy tool, William Callahan, describes what he calls "negative soft power," as soft power that is not meant to attract (is "negative") and used in domestic policy rather than in foreign affairs (Callahan 2015, 216). "Before it can spread values abroad," Callahan claims, "soft power policy first needs to produce and police values at home." He later states that while "discussions of soft power certainly seek to build favour among foreign audiences, they are also concerned with the identity/security issue of safeguarding regime legitimacy at

home" (Callahan 2015, 219). This negative soft power relies on the "us vs. them" model, or to put it in Benjaminian terms as Callahan does, "the civilized vs. the barbarians." In Russia's case, the United States represents "the barbarians" while Russians themselves are "the civilized." By denouncing "the barbarians" and praising their own "civilization" through conspiracy theories broadcast by Kremlin mouthpieces such as the television news source *Russia Today*,[3] government heads are able to make Russia more attractive to Russian citizens by favorably (and often dishonestly) comparing Russia to the West—in this way, Russia uses soft power strategy to direct power from Western governments to the Russian state (Callahan 2015, 220; Yablokov 2015, 312). In the words of Dr. Ilya Yablokov who does work on Russian conspiracy theories at the University of Leeds, "In the mind of a Russian nationalist with anti-Western views, the West appears as an ultimate and insidious 'Other' seeking to undermine the progress of the Russian nation towards its glorious future" (Yablokov 2015, 302). Because conspiracy theories that link the foreign and domestic spheres are part of the long-term strategy of the Russian government to maintain approval ratings, soft power, which Nye himself defines as a foreign policy tool, is an important domestic policy tool in the current Russian political context in the form of negative soft power.

Due to a lack of alternatives, and with the Russian economy continuing to stagnate, Putin has resorted to internal coercion to increase his negative soft power and

[3] *Russia Today* is a state-owned Russian news organization that has been accused of spreading disinformation and pro-Putin propaganda. It was branded "Vladimir Putin's English-language international mouthpiece" by *CBS News* in a January 2017 article (CBS News 2017).

maintain his status as President of the Russian Federation. Because the conspiracy theory of the War in Ukraine being Western-funded and CIA-backed is so crucial to Putin's negative soft power resources, as cultural elites who wield widespread influence such as Noize MC denounce this conspiracy theory as fabricated and show their support for Ukraine, steps must be taken to minimize the impact of their dissent. The implementation of coercive methods to maintain negative soft power used by the Putin regime following the annexation of Crimea and extending into present day is what I term the "blacklist effect" and represents this paper's central focus. The following section gives a brief introduction to this phenomenon.

THE BLACKLIST EFFECT

Noize MC, the rapper who suffered from the concert cancellations detailed in the first pages of this chapter, represents a subset of popular Russian entertainers, almost exclusively consisting of Russian citizens and citizens of former Soviet republics, who have faced governmental and social backlash after either actively voicing dissenting views or engaging in activities that could be viewed as resistance to governmental policies. The most common point of contention amongst this new wave of outspoken cultural elites has been Russia's recent military intervention in Ukraine. In the case of Andreev, his rapping "Tanzy" and wearing the Ukrainian national flag at his concert was portrayed by the majority of state-owned Russian media as a betrayal – many considered these acts to be a show of support for the neighboring Slavic state locked in complex

conflict with Russia (Demirjian 2014b). A substantial scholarship explores the topic of Russian President Vladimir Putin's cultural policy, and opposition to this policy by members of the cultural elite. However, most of this scholarship centers on the 2011-2013 protests sparked by the campaign and inauguration of Putin's third presidential term.

My research views this new wave of suppression of cultural elites following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, that targets those such as Noize MC who have been outspoken in their views against Russian involvement in Ukraine, as a continuation of the Culture War that began with these protests. While scholars, journalists, and oppositional leaders such as Masha Gessen have detailed the government's response to significant cultural events surrounding the 2011-2013 protests such as the arrest and detention of Pussy Riot, scholarship has not yet adequately addressed the developments in this most recent phase of this cultural conflict concerning resistance to Russian involvement in Ukraine.[4] I refer to this wave of governmentally initiated suppression originally generated by opposition to the Russian annexation of Crimea as the "blacklist effect."

In the same way that a blacklist denies those whose names appear on it access to services, recognition, work, or other privileges depending on the context, these Russian artists who oppose Russian military intervention in Ukraine suffer are repressed as a group. Venues big and small repeatedly and systematically bar them from appearing

[4] Pussy Riot is a Russian all-female protest rock group whose 2012 performance of an anti-Putin song in Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow and subsequent sentence of two years' imprisonment for "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred" attracted attention from news media around the world. For a detailed analysis of Pussy Riot and their trial see: (R. Johnston 2013).

publicly before large crowds, the majority of Russian media paints them as "traitors," and as a consequence these artists are ostracized from large swathes of Russian society, especially amongst those who support the government and its foreign policy. I refer to these cultural elites suffering under "the blacklist effect" as the "blacklisted." A later section will survey lives of blacklisted in music, literature, and radio/television in order to explore the specific details of repression and how they differ in various cultural realms in order to demonstrate that though this backlash may come in a variety of forms, it is pervasive throughout all major areas of the Russian cultural sphere. In these sections, many of my sources will analyze the strong-arm tactics employed by the government and emulated by many members of the public with the period following the annexation of Crimea in February 2014 as a focus. Due to the recent developments connected to this struggle amongst members of the cultural elite concerning the conflict in Ukraine, most of my research concerning this particular phase of the ongoing cultural conflict will come from newspaper reports and interviews with these artists conducted by journalists both in Russia and abroad.

THE BLACKLIST EFFECT AND RUSSIAN HIP-HOP

I will follow this broad survey of the blacklist effect with a detailed analysis of how it functions through the diverging fortunes that two of the main faces of the Russian hip-hop scene, Noize MC and head of Blackstar Entertainment, Timati, have experienced following 2014. Before getting into the specifics of the nationally-staged rap battle

between these two hip-hop superstars, I first need to set the scene on which this contest is waged.

Hip-hop arose in the Bronx during late-1970s house parties MC'd by such legends as DJs Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash. In its early days, hip-hop was only played at parties in impoverished black neighborhoods in New York (Diallo 2009).[5] The Bronx was not just any poor neighborhood, it was one of the worst in America in the late 1970s being known by such names such as "America's worst slum," the "ghetto of the ghettoes," and even being referred to as "Vietnam" by Ronald Reagan. One of the fathers of hip-hop, Grandmaster Flash, actually had to scavenge in junkyards to build his first sound system (Diallo 2009). With Sugarhill Gang's 1979 song "Rapper's Delight," the first commercially successful rap single, hip-hop began to be played in areas all across the nation, faraway from the Bronx house parties in which it started (Diallo 2009). Eventually this diffusion of hip-hop would eventually reach the Soviet Union, but before I continue the story on hip-hop's journey to Moscow, I first need to define some terms relevant to my discussion of the genre.

There are four "pillars" of hip-hop: MCing (rapping), DJing (disc-jockeying), breaking (breakdancing), and tagging (producing graffiti art, often with spray paint) (Brown 2009). As the focus of this thesis as it relates to hip-hop primarily concerns MCs (rappers), it is important that I make clear exactly what a "rapper" is. In the words of

[5] "MC" is short for Master of Ceremonies and also sometimes abbreviated as M.C. or emcee. The word "MC" may also be used as a verb meaning "to serve as an Master of Ceremonies." In the context of hip-hop, MC is synonymous with rapper, the person who is usually responsible for the delivery of lyrics over a beat or acapella in a hip-hop performance.

legendary rapper Tupac Shakur, rap is defined as "poetry, storytelling (…) with or without music (…). It depends on how you write it" (Karlsson 2009). Rap is poetry which is often (though not necessarily) accompanied by music, that, in the words of one hip-hop scholar, "emanates from the cultural reality of hip hop" (Pate 2009). "Rap" is the poetry/music, and "hip-hop" is the overall culture in which rap is only a part. KRS-One, a legendary producer and early hip-hop MC put it this way in his 2003 song Hip Hop VS Rap "Rap is something you do, Hip Hop is something you live" (KRS-One 2003). However, because rap is a primary component of music contained within hip-hop culture, "rap" as a genre of music has become synonymous with "hip-hop" music. Therefore, for sake of convenience, I will use the terms "hip-hop," "rap," and all of their variants interchangeably throughout this paper i.e. a "hip-hop artist" is the same as a "rapper." With my terms defined, let me continue with hip-hop's journey to Russia.

Rapping made its way to Russia through Russian breakdancing groups that listened to the music at breakdancing festivals and brought it back with them to the Soviet Union. Although breakdancing had achieved underground popularity by the mid-1980s during the Gorbachev era of glasnost rap, the element of hip-hop culture that most of the world is familiar with, did not garner any form of mainstream popularity until the 1990s (Feyh 2016, 36).[6] Mister Maloy was only thirteen years old when he recorded his hit rap single "I Will Die Young" (*Budu pogibat' molodym*) that would lead the music

[6] Glasnost (literally openness or transparency) was the slogan for Gorbachev's governmental reforms that allowed more transparency within the government as well as a more open society in which international cultural products (like rap music) were tolerated by the government for the first time.

industry of Russia to name him "Artist of the Year" in 1995. Although Maloy was one of the first to achieve any form of financial success from rap in Russia, his fame was short-lived. Never again did Maloy's songs hit the top charts or get any major airplay by Russian radio—the story was the same for most rappers of this period.

The marginal success of most 1990s rappers came in the form of collectives, many of which formed from breakdancing groups that were the original importers of hip-hop to Russia. Bad Balance (known commonly as Bad B) was one such group. According to Bad Balance's website, the noted Russia music critic Artemy Troitsky once called Bad B the "Russian Public Enemy," a label that notes their originality and ability to tear down walls in exposing the problems they saw around them and vocalized through their raps (Bad Balance 2012). Although their popularity faded by the early 2000s, the addition of Kirill Tolmatskiy aka Detsl to their new group, Bad B Alliance, helped rejuvenate their success. Detsl, produced by his father the famed Aleksandr Tolmatskiy, found great success in the late 1990s and early 2000s with his first two studio albums *Who Are You? (Kto ty?)* and *Street Fighter (Ulichni boets)*.

Detsl represented for many Russian listeners, exactly what Russian hip-hop was all about—he embraced hip-hop's African American and Jamaican roots (Kool Herc, the originator of hip-hop is Jamaican-American) by adopting dreadlocks as his signature look and touring in New York, something unheard of for Russian rappers up until that time. There was some pushback for his selection of haircut. While on a talk show in 2002, Detsl received some comments from what he described as "pure Russians" (chistie

russkie) in the audience. The young man, holding a Russian flag, says "Get back to Africa and shave there!" (author's translation). This incident is followed up by another Russian youth who, after being asked why he does not like Detsl, answers, "I don't respect (his) music or (his) baggy pants. It's all sent from niggers" (Rhymes Sho 2015). Although these young men do not voice their views eloquently, many in the crowd are not shocked by what they hear. Other young men copy the sentiment before finally silenced by Detsl's well-articulated rebuttal which is followed by a round of applause from the rest of the crowd. The idea of African and American influence seeping into Russia through hip-hop was a very real concern for many nationalist groups in Russia, a concern that led to violence as referenced in Detsl's song "*Pis'mo*" (The Letter).

To many of those who follow Russian hip-hop, Detsl was a catalyst for change in the Russian music industry as he admitted in an interview with Radio Svoboda (Radio Freedom) in early 2016 (Super 2016). In 2001, he performed at the Russian equivalent to the Grammy's, a feat unheard of for Russian hip-hop artists at the time (Arkhiv Muziykal'nogo Televideniya 2016). Enabled by his father's status and deep pockets as one of Russia's lead musical producer, supported by hip-hop royalty in Bad Balance, and fueled by a generation of young fans that wanted to distance themselves from the Soviet rock of their parents, Detsl as a phenomenon generated an audience and carved a niche in the Russian music industry for future hip-hop artists to fill once Detsl faded from the limelight (Rap.ru 2006). Groups such as Kasta, Tsentr, AK-47, and individuals such as Basta (formerly of Kasta), Guf, and Timati (Detsl's former backup dancer) have risen to

prominence during and following Detsl's period of fame. Although at first resistant to accept hip-hop due to its foreign influence, listeners accept hip-hop as Russian rappers have made it their own. As Alastair Pennycook and Tony Mitchell, two of the leading scholars in global hip-hop comment, "Global Hip Hops do not have one point of origin (…) but rather multiple, copresent, global origins" (Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook 2008, 40). Although hip-hop originated in the Bronx, global hip-hops originate in their local contexts.

Russian hip-hop defined here as hip-hop that is uniquely Russian because it is performed in Russian, includes Russian cultural references, and is performed by Russians to speak about Russian problems. Russian hip-hop is indeed its own entity, separate from but still influenced by American hip-hop. Since the early 2000s, it has grown by millions of fans especially focused among young audiences. In 2009, in an attempt to keep a public profile during his time as Russian Prime Minister, Putin attended the rap battle contest "Battle for Respect 3" (*Bitva za respekt 3*) and stated the following: "These young people, those in our country that are involved in this form of art carry forth their own, Russian (rossiiskii) charm. Rap, and even urban rap, is coarse and a little rude, but it is filled with social content which speaks about social problems, the problems of youths" (NTV.ru 2009). As this quote shows, even the highest of authorities in Russia acknowledges hip-hop as a platform for social change making it an ideal case study for the blacklist effect.

Hip-hop is an ideal area of popular culture in which to observe the blacklist effect due to its longstanding status as the genre of underrepresented, oppressed minorities to preach an anti-establishment message calling for social change. Although hip-hop has long been seen as a voice for the voiceless, as the renowned cultural theorist Stuart Hall reminds us, "[t]he danger arises because we tend to think of cultural forms as whole and coherent: either wholly corrupt or wholly authentic. Whereas they are deeply contradictory; they play on contradictions, especially when they function in the domain of the popular" (Hall 1998, 448).

Hip-hop, and specifically Russian hip-hop, does not only serve as a platform for anti-Putin protesters and those fighting for social change—it is contradictory. Unlike Noize MC and those that perform raps that target the misuse of power by authorities, Timati, one of the most popular rappers in the Russian Federation, has been in active partnership with the Kremlin in movements such as the government "healthy lifestyle campaign" going so far as to require that each member of his hip-hop collective agree to promoting this campaign when they sign with the hip-hop label (Goldman 2016). Timati was also active in his support for President Putin's controversial 2012 re-election campaign (TimatiOfficial 2012). While many other popular Russian hip-hop entertainers such as Nigativ, Zanuda, and St1m remain ostensibly apolitical in their recent rap releases, as the case of the Ukrainian music festival demonstrates, other artists such as Noize MC have used hip-hop to comment on this most recent wave of political contention. As Noize MC himself commented on other the vast majority of musicians in

Russia "don't protest against anything. They just play music about love" (Chernobrovkina, Kazantsev, and Bilalov 2011).

By using the traditions of hip-hop such as sampling, accompanying songs with politically-charged music videos, and using anti-establishment rhetoric, Noize MC has become one of the leading voices in opposing Putin's government. In fact, in the same reelection campaign of 2012 for which Timati recorded pro-Putin political advertisements, Noize MC performed in opposition protests against (Demirjian 2014a). After the initial cancellation of his concerts, Noize MC sought to protest in a vein that evokes Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque,[7] performing nude in a concert as a protest for the venue shutting off his sound earlier in the day when he attempted to perform his Russian/Ukrainian song "Tanzy." However, unlike Bakhtin's carnivalesque in which the Feast of Fools, or the hip-hop concert in our modern context, was a safe space for Sacreligious acts to occur without need for punishment (in this case disrespecting the powers that be and disregarding prior warnings), Noize MC has continued to suffer financially for his opposition in recent years (Malakhova and Gasparyan 2014; TV Dozhd 2015).Why has it become so imperative for the Putin regime to strictly control all aspects of the cultural sphere including hip-hop? It is perhaps best summed up by Deutsch, the Czech political scientist quoted earlier in our discussion of power:

[7] For Bakhtin, the medieval carnival was a place of liberation. Without the rules of the church or state pressing down on them, attendees could do as they wished with no repercussions. For a summary of the concept of the carnivalesque see: (Baldini 2008)

> The voluntary or habitual compliance of the mass of the population is the invisible but very real basis of power for every government. Although this compliance is largely voluntary, it is not entirely so. (…) In politics, the compliance habits of the many are preserved and reinforced by the *probability of enforcement* (emphasis in original) against the few who may transgress the law or disobey the government (Deutsch 233).

By publicly punishing the loudest voices of opposition such as Noize MC, Putin ensures compliance by the mass of the population. Although Noize MC does not possess an impressive physique, nor does he command a standing army (other than his diehard fans), he does wield power. Hannah Arendt, in her essay "On Violence," differentiates between violence and power in that power is the ability of a group to act in concert (no pun intended); violence needs an instrument to have its command obeyed (Arendt 1970, 4 and 51). Because Noize MC has the power to influence his listener's political views as evidenced by Demirjian's article in the *Washington Post* on Noize MC titled "Russian youths find politics as their pop icons face pressure," it is necessary to ensure that the views the rapper voices are pro-Putin or not said at all.

By appropriating parts of the cultural sphere such as Timati and Blackstar Entertainment, Putin offers a safer alternative to the controversial Noize MC. After all, Timati's concerts in Russia are never raided by drug police or local officials as those of Noize MC's have. These drug raids and concert cancelations are the instruments that Putin uses against Noize MC to lessen the young musician's power over his audience and dissuade him from acting against the regime in the future.

This explanation for the current events in Russia fits with Arendt's idea of violence as separate from power, "Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance (…) Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it" (Arendt 1970, 80). As Arendt shows here and throughout her work, violence is used when power is threatened. Violence has an objective, but oftentimes the means overwhelm the end. "If goals are not achieved rapidly, the result will be not merely defeat but the introduction of the practice of violence into the whole body politic" (Arendt 1970, 80). This conclusion of Arendt was demonstrated in Noize MC's case by the compliance of venue owners across Russia to cancel on the artist rather than face backlash from the authorities. By declaring that the government should create an official blacklist and list Noize MC as the first name, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation showed that it, too, would comply with Putin's system, even if it meant attempting to repress a young musician that speaks out against the CPRF's political opponent in President Putin (Malakhova and Gasparyan 2014).

When applying power to politics, Arendt says "[p]ower is indeed of the essence of all government, but violence is not" (Arendt 1970, 51). The danger for violence comes when this power is threatened. The Russian government in the early 2000s was the central source of power after Putin settled affairs with the powerful Russian mafia and oligarchs that had dominated the 1990s. However, as Arendt warns, "monopolization of power causes the drying up or oozing away of all authentic power sources in the country" (Arendt 1970, 85).

Because the Putin regime allows no other power source to arise in his country and threaten his dominance, Russia has slowly been weakening under Putin, which explains why Putin has so few power resources apart from coercion and negative soft power today. This situation is likely to continue to develop as Putin continues to limit alternatives in every aspect of Russian life through coercion. In making sure that her distinction between power and violence is clear, Arendt defines the terms thusly, "The extreme form of power is All against One, the extreme form of violence is One against All" (Arendt 1970, 42). As Putin continues to limit alternatives, offering the people only one choice, himself, his regime becomes more based on violence than power. Because he has been extremely successful in consensus building and in preaching his worldview of a powerful Russia, he has outlived many such authoritarians that base their legitimacy to lead on violence. To understand better the delicate game that Putin is playing in balancing maintaining Russia's respect in the international realm and Putin's authority at home, I now turn to an examination of Putin's domestic and foreign policies and how they combine to boost his approval ratings allowing him to maintain his status as the President of the Russian Federation.

Chapter 2: Putin's Russia

In order to elucidate the associations between power, culture, and violence, I have chosen to concentrate this analysis of power within the political climate in the Russian Federation of the 2010s. Here, like few places elsewhere in the world, the connections between power, information, and audience are on display for those curious enough to search for them. These relationships between elements of power encircle one man in Russia: President Vladimir Putin. This chapter will detail Putin's rise to power, his consolidation of power, and his strategies to protect his power base. Putin uses these same strategies today in protecting his status as President. Taking a brief look into Putin's ascension to the office of President and the way he dealt with problems he inherited from Yeltsin is necessary in order to highlight the patterns of his personal brand of repression that have continued into his third term as President of Russia.

Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin became President of the Russian Federation on December 31, 1999. Just as the world prepared to enter a new age following the turn of the millennium, so too did Russia. Boris Yeltsin, the former Supreme Soviet member and first President of Russia, with his health deteriorating as quickly as his support base, named then Prime Minister Putin the interim President to hold the office until elections could be held the following spring. Yeltsin needed someone who could take over where he had left off while also letting the past remain in the past—many have speculated that the true reason Yeltsin chose Putin as his successor was that Putin would not come after them in their retirement, seeking to incriminate them on charges of past corruption

(Shevtsova 2005, 32). Where Yeltsin, throughout his political career, had focused on defeating his enemies, consolidating power, and overcoming obstacles, he did not know how to go about building a new state. As Lilia Shevsova states about Yeltsin in her book *Putin's Russia,* "He [Yeltsin] was not prepared for state building, for the effort of everyday governance, for consensus making, for knitting a new national unity. By nature he was a terminator, not a transformational leader" (Shevtsova 2005, 4). By forfeiting his office as Russian President, Yeltsin placed this responsibility of forming a new state out of the decaying remnants of the Soviet structure against the chaotic backdrop of Russia's "Wild 90s" at Vladimir Putin's feet—Putin rose to the challenge.

CHECHEN WARS

One of the main crises, and one that required Putin's immediate attention was the start of the Second Chechen War. The First Chechen War, which had taken place a few years prior from 1994 to 1995, had ended with an uneasy ceasefire agreement and a demoralized Russia that had failed to dominate a significantly smaller Chechnya. In the weeks surrounding Yeltsin's placing Putin in the office of Prime Minister of Russia in August of 1999, Chechens of the Islamic International Brigade invaded Dagestan with the aim of uniting Dagestan and Chechnya with the eventual goal of expelling all of the territory's Russian citizens. Following a series of apartment bombings in Moscow that Putin claimed were caused by Chechen terrorists (and not by the FSB as many at the time speculated), Russian troops invaded on September 22, with no other than the new Prime Minister Putin as commander of the invasion forces. He promised to destroy the terrorists

that responsible for the bombings, and he saw a surge in approval as Russians believed that Putin could protect them (Treisman 2011, 593). Rather than risking a repeat of the great number of Russian casualties of the First Chechen War, Putin promised few Russian casualties as he planned to use Russian air superiority and fracturing the Chechen forces in order to force them to submit—instead of using Russian bodies in the war zone, Putin gathered favor with one faction of Chechen warlords and had them do the fighting for him (Van Herpen 2014, 187 and p. 195).

In addition to this Chechenizing of the war, the Second Chechen War differed from the First in being far more violent and ruthless. In the words of Marcel Van Herpen, "On the Russian side there existed a clear urge to take revenge and punish the Chechen people for the lost first war" (Van Herpen 2014, 187). Tens of thousands of Chechens died, both militants and civilians. On this latter note, that of civilian casualties, many were part of mass executions carried out by Russian Special Forces. These executions were done in secret, planned to leave no trace of the identity of the perpetrator. In order to make it more difficult for authorities in Chechnya to identify who had committed these atrocious acts, Russian Special Forces began to blow up the corpses of Chechen civilians. (Van Herpen 2014, 193-194). Whether or not Putin knew of or ordered these practices is up to debate—another characteristic of the Second Chechen War is its obvious lack of documentation. Even though somewhere between fifteen and twenty percent of the Chechen population was annihilated during this conflict, it is difficult for international organizations to officially classify it as a genocide as there are no records either of orders

given by political leadership or of minutes of the Security Council of the Russian Federation (Van Herpen 2014, 199). By limiting records and giving his generals a great deal of freedom in how they chose to command their troops, Putin managed to distance himself from the atrocities of the war while still reaping the popularity boost that the Second Chechen War offered.

Although the the Russian population's views on Putin's Chechen War policies would eventually sour as Russian casualties continued to increase, producing a net negative on his approval ratings, they helped him secure his election as the President of Russia. Support for military force in Chechnya peaked at 70% in March 2000, the month of the presidential elections (Treisman 2011, 600). Although Putin's strategies of total war in Chechnya and complete secrecy that allowed him to keep his hands clean would eventually fail to buffer his approval ratings, they form the foundation of his strategy in consolidating and managing his power by: 1) maintaining reasonable doubt in his involvement in illegal and deplorable activities while 2) being in close enough proximity to such activities to make potential opponents wary of him. At the same time, by invading Chechnya only after the Moscow apartment bombings and by "Chechenizing" the war, Putin established his image as the defender of the people. This image fell in line with Putin's exercise in nation-building. He wanted to show the people that the government served the nation's interests while caring for individual Russian lives. In reference to what Putin was aiming for in his Chechen campaign and how it connects to this concept of nation building, Richard Sakwa states, "[f]or Putin the political and the emotional

levels of nation building went together, and the fact that he represented a clear vision for both was one of the main sources of his enduring popularity. Putin was able to make Russians feel a bit better about themselves" (Sakwa 2004, 181). By leading a brutal campaign that violated multiple international laws on war crimes such as the "blowing up" of civilian bodies, Putin sought retribution for the humiliation of the First Chechen War. He showed the people of Chechnya and the world that the Russian military still had some bite to its bark. He also demonstrated that he was willing to do what was needed to make the world safe for Russian people. During this time of international unease and violence at Russia's border, Putin was also consolidating power in Moscow.

CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

Over the eight years Boris Yeltsin served as President of Russia, the power and authority of the office had greatly shrunken as compared to that of General Secretary of the Soviet Union. Upon coming into office, Yeltsin worked to shrink the government, particularly in the security services and military. He also privatized the vast network of property that the Soviet state had controlled, selling it off to the highest bidder and in many cases to friends and close contacts. Until news broadcasts of the bloody First Chechen War began to have a negative impact on his 1996 reelection campaign, Yeltsin had for the most part allowed for a free press. By 2002, Putin was still facing a problem of "excesses in the media," a problem that the new Russian President claimed would be difficult to "resolve effectively (…) simply with some kind of tough administrative measures" (Sakwa 2004, 57). Putin wanted to restore to the office of President of the

Russian Federation the respect that he felt it deserved, and as this quote shows, he was early in his first term, he was contemplating on ways to correct this imbalance in respect. Yeltsin had allowed the power of his office to be usurped by news agencies, mafia dons, and oligarchs throughout the 1990s. Putin aimed to seize that power and return it to its rightful place, in his hands.

Politics: Vertical of Power

Four days after his inauguration, on May 13, 2000, Putin issued an order that would create his "vertical of power." As many regional governors had done their part to oppose Putin's election, Putin sought to correct this problem by restructuring the government in a pyramid, a "power vertical" in which all lower government officials answered to their highers up, and Putin, as the official in the highest elected office, superseded them all. In one fell swoop, Putin had taken all autonomy away from the leaders of Russia's federal regions and instituted a system similar to the top-down Soviet model in which all orders are directed from Moscow. (Dawisha 2014, 269).

In order to ensure that all federal regions accepted the restructuring and did as they were told, Putin created seven super-federal districts and installed heads of each that he knew he could trust: "Five of the seven were generals, two veterans of the war in Chechnya and three from the security services" (Dawisha 2014, 270). As Putin was a former colonel of the KGB, Head of the FSB, and Commander and Chief of the Russian military (one who gave his generals a free hand in decimating Chechnya), it can be assured that these newly were loyal to the young president.

At this same time, Putin introduced laws that weakened the power of regions and the Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian Parliament. By allying Unity, Putin's party, with the Communists and eventually merging with the Fatherland-All Russia party to form United Russia, Putin's bloc was strong enough to pass the law in the lower chamber of the Parliament, completely bypassing the Federation Council. While governors and presidents of all Russian federal districts would sit on the Council, Putin could appoint additional members to the Council at his discretion (Dawisha 2014, 270-271). He then created a State Council that would serve as an advisory body to the president. Putin had instituted his "vertical of power" despite resistance from the Federal Council and the powerful oligarch Berezovsky. He had shown that he was able to forge coalitions between disparate groups and make these coalitions serve his needs. Taking no time to savor his election victory, Putin took steps to ensure that the political system would serve him and him alone. Bit by bit, he began to chip into other institutions in Russia that could be used to oppose him.

Press: NTV Takeover

Even before he was elected as Russia's second President, television helped Putin secure his place of power. A 1999 survey by White, Oates, and McAllister concluded that "media bias helped secure Putin's victory: 'The decisive factor in this dramatic reversal of fortunes appeared to be the media, particularly state television'" (Treisman 2011, 595). However, Putin's relationship with the media soon soured. Shortly into his first term as President of Russia, in August 2000, Putin faced his first media fiasco. While performing

scheduled naval exercises off of Russia's northern coast, ships involved in the maneuvers detected an explosion. After being notified of the detected explosions, Admiral Vyacheslav Popov did nothing for twelve hours as he awaited the next scheduled radio communication. It took six hours for the navy to discover the absence of the submarine Kursk, one of the most decorated in the Russian fleet. After a leak in the Kursk's torpedo room led to an explosion that caused the vessel to sink, 28 of the sub's 118 surviving crewmembers remained trapped in a compartment near the submarine's rear rescue hatch. The navy produced reports citing that the situation was under control, but that rescue was not possible at that time due to storms, a damaged hatch, strong currents, and the sub's steep angle in mud. On August 20, eight days after the initial explosions, British and Norwegian divers finally reached the submarine and realized that the Russian navy had lied about all of these – "there had been no storms, no strong currents, no damaged hatch, and no steep angle"(Baker and Glasser 2005, 89).

Although the navy alerted Putin of the accident while the president spent time at his resort in Sochi, his admirals informed the Russian leader that they were managing the situation. In part because he did not see how he could help the situation, Putin waited five days before returning to Moscow. When the head of the Russian state arrived, he found himself in the midst of a media hellstorm. While Putin relaxed at his resort, NTV, one of Russia's top news channels, broadcasted reports of governmental mismanagement, paying special attention to the young president's silence and lack of action during the aftermath of the Kursk's sinking. Following NTV's example, Channel One aired wives of

the Kursk sailors voicing their grievances about the government's lack of response to the situation. This specific report angered Putin, who then responded by claiming that the interviews were falsified: "[y]ou hired two whores for a hundred in order to push me down"(Baker and Glasser 2005, 88). Three days after returning to Moscow, the president met with victims' relatives in an officers' hall. He expressed his sympathy and said that he understood that they were hurting, but that the government was doing everything in its power to help the trapped crewmates. After claiming that that the navy had accepted all offers of foreign help, he was strongly rebuked by the shouting crowd who claimed that they knew from television reports that foreign governments had offered help earlier. "Television?" Putin called out. "They're lying. Lying. Lying"(Baker and Glasser 2005, 89).

As reported by Baker and Glasser, even from the very beginning of his first term in office, "[n]o one understood better than Putin just how powerful television could be in the new Russia and that he who controls it controls the country" (Baker and Glasser 2005, 83). In the months following the sinking of the Kursk, the state had seized control in illegal "pogroms" of both channels that had reported negative press about the government, Channel One and NTV. The forced governmental takeover of these channels, the former property of oligarchs Berezovsky and Gusinsky respectfully, showed Russia's business class that the new president was not one to be intimidated. As the opposition leader Nemtsov was quoted as saying in a 2000 interview, "The destruction of the media empires of Berezovsky and Gusinsky led to the understanding

that the present regime would not allow itself to be blackmailed. Only those working with the authorities would be able to influence the media" (Sakwa 2014a, 28).

After seizing these massive media holdings, the new president then "gifted" the channels to trusted allies. As Baker and Glasser note, "The message to the rest of the media was clear. Putin did not like criticism and would not tolerate powerful television channels in anything but loyal hands"(Baker and Glasser 2005, 96). A poll done by the Public Opinion Foundation found that following the takeover of NTV, 57% of Russians actually supported censorship of the media. According to Baker and Glasser, Russians were not accustomed to free and fair press, and just wanted NTV to continue high-quality shows and foreign movies that they had come to expect from the channel (Baker and Glasser 2005, 97). A multitude of surveys of Russian citizens have shown that they are willing to sacrifice rights for order (Treisman 2011, 594).

This governmental domination of television and other sources of information remains in place to this day. While the Internet has been the one place that the Russian government has had difficulty in controlling, television is government-dominated, and press is allowed a degree of freedom uncommon in television or radio. In an interview with Baker and Glasser, one of Putin's senior advisors recalled in a private interview, "The president has a very clear idea: let them print whatever they want, nobody reads it" (Baker and Glasser 2005, 96).

Statistics show that the president's opinion is for the most part correct, even up to present day—Russians do not rely on printed media for their news. In a 2013 study, The

Public Opinion Foundation, one of Russia's leading pollsters, found that 88% of Russians rely on television as one of their primary news sources with only 16% saying the same for newspapers (FOMnibus 2013). This preponderance of the Russian populace to access their news through television is significant in that this form of media is almost exclusively state-controlled (Freedom House 2015). The internet-based television station *Dozhd* (Rain), which has often been described as Russia's sole independent television news outlet was declared insolvent in 2015 by the general director of the station, Natalya Sindeyeva (Freedom House 2015). Sindeyeva made this announcement in March of 2015 after satellite news providers began to drop *Dozhd* from their subscription packages, reportedly under pressure from the Kremlin (Freedom House 2015). While *Dozhd* was revived due to donations from their viewers in 2016, it remains the sole independent station on Russian television today. Together with radio station *Ekho Moskvy*, they are among the only independent voices in Russia today. As Laqueur notes in reference to this point in his book *Putinism,* this suppression of the media has gone far beyond intimidation and loss of funds: "[i]nconvenient journalists have been threatened, physically attacked, and in some cases even killed" (Laqueur 2015, 153).

Despite this continued suppression of independent news sources, statistics show that Russians continue to watch state-controlled television and trust the reliability of its information, a trend that continues concerning news coverage on the conflict in Ukraine (Levada Tsentr 2014). A later section that details the Ukrainian conflict will go into more depth of television's role in the information war between Russia and Ukraine. By

controlling the media, Putin is able to both protect his image from negative press and damage the reputations of those that pose a threat to him and his regime. By dominating the Russian media as he has since early-on in his first term, Putin possesses a powerful tool that he utilizes in managing public opinion.

Oligarchs: The Khordorkovsky Affair

By the time Yeltsin had given his throne to Putin, the oligarchs collectively wielded more power than the president himself. They had more money and more domestic political influence than the unpopular president. Yeltsin had relied on financing by oligarchs (known as the "Davos Pact") to secure his victory in the 1996 presidential elections. The oligarchs wanted Yeltsin in power as it allowed them a more or less free hand to conduct business as they saw fit. The rise of Putin put many oligarchs at ill ease. This former colonel of the KGB was a complete unknown at the time of his nomination for Prime Minister. Was he friend or foe?

Putin made it crystal clear during his first presidential election campaign what sort of relationship he planned to make with the oligarchs. In terms shockingly similar to Stalin's anti-*kulak* rhetoric, Putin promised that if the people of Russia elected him, "Russia's oligarchs will be abolished as a class" (Sakwa 2014a, 229). The people liked Putin's hard stance on the oligarchs that had devastated Russia for their own profit during the past decade—they wanted revenge. Shortly after his being elected president, Putin staged what is known as the "anti-oligarch revolution."

Part of this "revolution" has already been detailed in the preceding section. The takeover of Berezovsky's and Gusinsky's media holdings was part of Putin's consolidation of the oligarchs' resources into Kremlin hands. With Berezovsky and Gusinsky driven from the country, and Vinogradov in financial ruin due to the 1998 Russian Financial Crisis, there was one lone oligarch left from the powerful "Davos Pact" that had enabled Yeltsin's reelection. That man was Mikhail Khordorkovsky, the head of the financial company Bank Menatep and Chairman and CEO of Yukos, Russia's largest privately-owned oil distributor.

By 2003, Khordorkovsky was the richest man in Russia and the most conspicuous example that Putin had not yet fulfilled his campaign promise of destroying the oligarchs. Rather than keeping a low profile, Khordorkovsky enraged Putin by attempting to sell his company abroad for a huge profit, putting 40% of Russian oil in foreign hands (Sakwa 2014a p. xv). Although this move was the final straw for Putin, Khordorkovsky had been a thorn in the young president's side for his entire time in power. 2003 was the year that this conflict of interests came to a head. In February of 2003, Putin met for the fifth time with business leaders in the Kremlin, this time to discuss administrative reform. As Khordorkovsky gave a speech on the continuing corruption in Russian government, "Putin's expression hardened"(Sakwa 2014a, 54). Later in the meeting, after Putin rejected Khordorkovsky's proposal to build an oil pipeline using private funds, Khordorkovsky declared, "Vladimir Vladimirovich, you do not understand the importance of establishing relations with China." This comment obviously enraged Putin.

After the meeting, Khordorkovsky was ordered to leave Russia. (Sakwa 2014a, 55). Putin could not tolerate a challenge to his authority, and Khordorkovsky was just that. He had to be dealt with. He had to be made an example of.

Although Khordorkovsky, like all Russian oligarchs, was suspected of acquiring his great wealth through illegal means involving bribing the correct officials and embezzlement of government funds, he did not believe that Putin would jail him. In a response to Irina Yasina's, head of Open Russia, warning to him Khordorkovsky responded, "They won't jail me. After all, they are not enemies of their own country" (Sakwa 2014a, 83). The Yukos CEO believed that because his company was such an enormous, integrated part of the Russian GDP and that he was taking steps to legitimize his company (such as the creation of Open Russia, an attempt to invest in and strengthen Russian civil society), that he was safe from Putin's wrath. He was wrong.

On October 25, 2003, authorities entered Khordorkovsky's chartered plane at Tolmachevo Airport in Novosibirsk. On that day at 5 a.m., twenty anti-terror FSB agents stormed the plane, forcing everyone on board to the floor in a move that violated many procedural rules. (Sakwa 2014a, 83). Khordorkovsky was charged with personal income-tax evasion, avoiding corporate taxes, falsifying documents and theft (Sakwa 2014a, 84). After a highly-publicized (and televised) trial, Khordorkovsky was sentenced to nine years in a penal colony(Sakwa 2014a, 101). Yukos was merged with Rosneft, the largest oil company in Russia, owned by the Russian Government. During this merger, "[t]hose not entirely loyal to the Putinised regime fell on their swords or were purged" (Sakwa

2014a, 87). Appearing on the now-governmentally-controlled NTV in 2005, the deputy prosecutor general, Vladimir Kolesnikov, warned that what had happened to Khordorkovsky could happen to others, "I can say one thing, [Khodorkovsky's] case will not be the last. We have got plenty of cases in the cartridge clip" (Baker and Glasser 2005, 101). As this statement and the means by which it was delivered clearly show, Putin had been serious in his campaign promise. Any oligarch who was not steadfastly loyal to Putin would see themselves exiled like Berezovsky or jailed like Gusinsky and Khordorkovsky. Putin showed that the law served him, and that no one, not even the richest man in Russia, was untouchable. This show of force even had positive effects in Putin's approval ratings; following Khodorkovsky's arrest, his ratings went up by seven points (Treisman 2011, 606). With the Russian public supporting his bold and dishonest moves and his weapons of television, the courts, and the Federal Security Bureau at his side, he could erase anyone that dared challenge him.

Economy: Seizing Gazprom

With political institutions, the military, the police, the press, and finally the oligarchs all bowing to their leader, the final beast that Putin needed to tame in order to make his power absolute was the one that had plagued Yeltsin throughout his time in power, the Russian economy. Through his plans of speedy privatization and "shock therapy," Yeltsin had sold away the majority of the former Soviet state's enormous economic resources, most to the oligarchs that Putin battled with during his first years in power.

Under Yeltsin, Gazprom, one of Russia's leading extractors and exporters of natural gas, had issued enormous loans totaling billions of dollars to oligarchs, often with little promise of repayment. As Ben Judah noted, Gazprom was treated "like a giant government slush fund" instead of a natural resource company (Dawisha 2014, 281). Immediately after being elected, Putin exerted his power on Gazprom by nominating its founder and chairman of the board of directors, Viktor Chernomyrdin, to be Russia's Ambassador to Ukraine. After removing Chernomyrdin, Putin replaced him with the head of his electoral campaign, Dmitri Medvedev. Putin then attended a Gazprom meeting on May 30, 2001. Here he announced that he wanted Rem Vyakhirev, the CEO of Gazprom replaced with Aleksey Miller, "a deputy minister of energy and Putin's St. Petersburg coworker." He convinced the board that it would be in their best interests to back Miller. Vyakhirev was temporarily named chairman of the board with Medvedev as his deputy, but he was soon retired with Medvedev becoming chairman until he was elected President of Russia in 2008 (Dawisha 2014, 281).

This takeover of the natural gas giant was a huge asset to Putin. Oligarchs who had taken loans from Gazprom under Yeltsin had given shares in their companies as collateral. As a result, Gazprom ended up owning massive holdings of powerful companies in sectors of the Russian economy outside of energy such as Gusinskiy's Media-Most company (Dawisha 2014, 281). With Medvedev on the board of directors, Putin had insight and influence in the direction of the company. By buying shares of major energy companies and installing those loyal to him as the directors of firms, Putin

had in effect seized control of the majority of the Russian economy. To this day, the two largest natural gas and oil companies in Russia, Rusneft and Gazprom, are majority owned by the Russian government. Their heads are loyal to Putin either because he placed them there or due to the fact that he did not remove them.

For almost anyone involved in the energy sector in Russia during the first decade of the twenty-first century, life was good. From the time he was first nominated by Yeltsin as Head of the FSB to the end of Putin's second term as President of Russia, oil production rose by two thirds and global oil prices rose by thirteen times what they had been in 1998 (Judah 2013, 9). Naturally, this boon to the Russian economy that had struggled under Yeltsin was an enormous asset to the Putin regime and bolstered his popular ratings for most of his first two terms as Russian President. Yegor Gaidar, the economist who had designed the controversial "shock therapy" under Yeltsin stated, "It is not hard to be popular and have political support when you have ten years of growth of real incomes at 10 percent a year" (Judah 2013, 3). Putin used this time of prosperity to further solidify his political support. During the 2000s, Russian oil production was not the only thing that rose by two thirds, the number of bureaucrats did as well. These newly-placed politicians owed their jobs to Putin and gladly joined his United Russia party (Judah 2013, 4). In this way, the booming Russian economy allowed Putin to strengthen his grip on power.

CONCLUSION: THE HOUSE THAT PUTIN HAS BUILT

With nearly every major faction of Russian society firmly under his control, Putin has consolidated a massive structure that has succumbed to his will. "When all is said and done, this is the house that Vladimir Putin has built. (…) It is the Russia of Vladimir Putin, built in his own image, subject to his will and whim, to his penchant for 'manual control'"(Dawisha 2014, 349). However, this centralization of power has led to weaknesses within the structure itself. Medvedev, Putin's long-time accomplice and current Prime Minister, has himself complained about the weaknesses of the power system saying, "Whatever the president does not coordinate, nobody else bothers to coordinate either. It's bad. It means that we have an obsolete and wholly inadequate control system that ought to be replaced" (Sakwa 2014b, 50). As this image of a frustrated second-in-command shows, power is not distributed efficiently within Russia—it has all found its way into the hands of one man, President Vladimir Putin.

How has Putin remained so popular with the people in spite of his blatant power grabs? Was it the president's tough stance on Chechnya or his retribution on the oligarchs that had usurped Russia's fortunes during the 1990s? Data suggests that Putin has something else to thank for his continued popularity, oil prices. In his analysis of Putin's presidential approval ratings, Treisman states: "Simulations suggest a generic new president would have become extremely popular—judo or no judo—as a result of the [oil] boom" (Treisman 2011, 607). As this study suggests, Yeltsin could have nominated a basketball as his successor and the masses would have supported it following the

Russian economy's recovery. However, as we know, Russia has suffered from financial crises during Putin's stay in power. Why does he remain popular? Just as Putin's brutality in Chechnya gained him initial support prior to his first presidential election, so too, did the short Russo-Georgian War of 2008 cause a surge in support for the president and his partner, Medvedev. If we subtract this boost in support caused by the decimation of the Georgian army in 2008, Putin's ratings actually fell during the period of 2008-2009 (Treisman 2011, 607).

As this fall suggests, Putin's approval rating until recently has still been strongly linked to the economy. But then how do we explain Putin's approval rating consistently over 80% throughout the Russian Financial Crisis that began in 2014 due to a combination of a global drop in oil prices and Western sanctions as a result of Russia's annexation of Crimea? The next chapter will detail the rise of the opposition in Russia and Putin's successful attempts in crushing them. As this chapter has shown, Putin has amassed an unheard of amount of both hard and soft power resources. The next chapter will show how he has positioned the brunt of these resources in suppressing internal dissent while grandstanding in the international spotlight as a man who will not allow his country to bow down before any other power.

Chapter 3: Russia of the Others

As discussed in the introduction of this paper, the second dimension of power, and the one that most concerns Putin within the cultural sphere of Russia, is limiting alternatives. One way to get others to see your perspective is to limit the available worldviews that they can choose from. More people will believe or at least tolerate a line of thinking if it is the only one that they know. There are many easily made parallels between Putin's Russia and other historic authoritarian regimes. However, because Milosevic's Serbia (1987-2000) has already been referenced elsewhere in this paper and can serve as a good source of comparison for examining Putin's Russia, it will serve as our example here. Milosevic, as mentioned in the introduction, adhered to a zero-tolerance policy on alternatives. He banned demonstrations, blocked all opposition media, eliminated all opposition from the presidential elections and executed an ethnic cleanse of all minorities within his country (Stevanovic 2004). Although paling in comparison to many of his atrocities, as detailed in the introduction, he also banned all forms of music from the radio that were not pro-government (Gordy 1999). Unlike Milosevic's Serbia in which all alternatives were effectively destroyed, Putin's Russia allows alternatives to exist, albeit only in a form that it can tolerate. In other words, people can more-or-less broadcast what they want as long as they do not threaten the Putin regime or its version of events on a topic of importance.

In Andrew Wilson's *Virtual Politics*, he states, "The post-Soviet states are not totalitarian. Other versions of reality creep in at the margins. The main priority of the

powers-that-be is that their version of reality should predominate – they know that it can never exclusively dominate" (Wilson 2005, 45). This logic is behind why *TV Rain* and *Echo of Moscow* are allowed to remain in existence. While Putin will apply pressure to these media outlets when they are skirting a topic that the regime deems important (i.e. issuing a fine to *Echo of Moscow* when it interviewed Ukrainian nationalists on air), the existence of independent media allows the government to claim free speech exists in their country while doing all they can to suppress true expression. Wilson says, "They want the majority to believe something like their version of events; where necessary, they want key Western actors to buy the same story too. But more crudely, they are happy simply to get away with it; not every loose end needs to be tied up" (Wilson 2005, 45).

This chapter will address the loose ends that have needed binding in the recent past as well as the ones that Putin has allowed to remain untied. Chapter four will talk specifically about artists who have threatened Putin's version of events of happenings in Ukraine. This chapter focuses on the Putin regime limiting alternatives in Russia within the recent past. There exists a sizeable opposition in Russia, a part of Russia that rarely agrees with Putin's version of events on any issue. This opposition exists inside of Putin's Russia, but they are not *of* Putin's Russia. They are the "Other" Russia, the Russians who can conceive of a Russia without Putin, a Russia of alternatives. This chapter is about their struggle with Putin and the strategies that the Russian President has used to suppress them, strategies that he continues to use against "blacklisted" (the topic of chapter four) today.

THE SNOW REVOLUTION

For many blacklisted, those who have challenged the Kremlin's version of events in the Ukrainian Crisis, 2014 was not their first time to speak out against Putin. In 2011, Vladimir Putin announced that he would be running for an unprecedented third term as Russian President. No one before had attempted running for a third term. If Yeltsin's health and support among the Russian populace had not failed him in the late 1990s, many speculated on whether he would attempt to run for a third term although it violated the Russian Constitution's limit on two presidential terms.

However, months prior to announcing Putin's presidential run, then-President Medvedev introduced a bill to the Duma, seconded by Prime Minister Putin, that would reinterpret a clause in the Russian Constitution. Instead of limiting a person to two terms as president, the Constitution limited a candidate to two *consecutive* presidential terms. After this bill was passed into law, Putin's decision to run for a third term was constitutional. It was no shock when Putin declared his candidacy in October 2011 for the 2012 presidential election. Protesters did not begin to gather en masse, until December of that year when the parliamentary election results were announced in favor of Putin's party, United Russia. Opposition leaders soon voiced their frustration at the manner in which the authorities had conducted the elections: they had created barriers for parties to be listed on ballots, put limits on campaigning, introduced difficulties for opposition parties to get air time on Kremlin-controlled television, etc. One such leader, journalist Masha Gessen, writes in her book *The Man Without a Face,* "I have not voted in a parliamentary election for more than a dozen years, because Putin's laws rendered

elections meaningless." She then cites reasons for why elections have lost all meaning: "political parties could no longer get on the ballot without the Kremlin's approval, members of parliament were no longer elected directly, and the results were rigged by election officials anyway" (Gessen 2012, 272).

After the parliamentary election results came in with United Russia winning and many independent election observers reporting fraud, protesters such as Gessen began reluctantly to organize. They knew that protesting in Putin's Russia could be dangerous and was always unfair – to organize a protest, a petition must be registered with the government weeks prior to the actual event, naming their approximate numbers. If the authorities decided to grant the request, an area would be cordoned off with a perimeter marked with metal detectors at the entrances for the protest. As Gessen notes, legal protesters are basically forced to speak to themselves as they are separated from any audience. The alternative is to stage an illegal protest (after being denied permission from authorities or never requesting it), an action which leads to arrests (Gessen 2012, 274-275).

The manner in which protests are allowed to occur only in forms sanctioned by the government demonstrates this idea of allowing a limited set of alternatives to exist. The authorities can point to these protests as their allowance for opposition and free speech. Any protest that seeks to have an actual impact by broadcasting their message where a receptive public might hear it thereby challenging the regime's version of events, are almost always shut down immediately. The authorities can then say that they are

merely upholding the law, and the ones organizing these protests are troublemakers who failed to go through the proper channels.

Protests, both legal and illegal, formed in the days following the parliamentary election. While the protestors main slogan was "For Free Elections," the protest movement (known as the Snow Revolution due to the protestor's donning white ribbons and clothing) came to call for a range of different changes including freedom of press and speech, admittance of corruption in the voting process, and a revote in the parliamentary elections. Opposition leaders such as Alexey Navalny saw the Putin regime and United Russia as the perpetrators of the corruption and unfair elections. Navalny was in the forefront of the "Putin, go away!" campaign, branding the United Russia party as "the party of crooks and thieves" (Ioffe 2011). These protests were known in the West as the "anti-Putin protests." Tens of thousands of the "Other Russians" coalesced in Russia's major cities to demand their country back. The sheer numbers of protesters had not conglomerated since the early 1990s under Yeltsin (Gessen 2012, 277). Although police did arrest protest leaders such as Navalny during the first protests, no other immediate action was taken. The Kremlin did not know how to respond. They had never faced such a massive and vocal opposition.

The Putin regime's petrified state soon changed, however. The opposition's main goal that they realistically hoped for was not that Putin would lose the presidential election – they understood that he was too powerful and popular among working class Russia for that – but that he would be forced to win in the runoff vote by not securing a

majority in the first round of voting. This was a realistic goal as even if the election results had been falsified, United Russia had slipped by over ten points in the parliamentary elections. If the opposition forced the presidential elections to a runoff, the hope was that Putin would be forced to make concessions in adapting his policies to satisfy more interests than just his own. Putin was determined to secure a decisive win on the first ballot.

He wrote a series of articles published in newspapers like *Independent Newspaper* (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*) and the state-run *Russian Newspaper* (*Rossiiskaya Gazeta*) painting his view of the future, trying to rally together the popular majority that had supported him in his first two terms as president. He warned against "multiculturalism" and "separatism" that was becoming popular amongst the vocal liberal groups involved in the protests. This type of thinking could not be allowed to exist as it challenged Russia's existence as a whole. In his article on January 23, 2012, Putin claims "It [multiculturalism] erects an absolute "right of the minority to stand out" and it does not do enough to balance this right – civic, conduct, and cultural responsibilities – in relation to the native population and society as a whole" (Putin 2012b).

In Putin's mind, Russia had to come together during this transitional period for the good of the nation. Too many voices and too many parties would divide Russia and prevent it from continuing on the path to prosperity. In the Prime Minister's view, Navalny's call to "stop feeding the Caucasus" referencing the Russian government's funneling absurd sums of money into the Head of the Chechen Republic (Chechnya),

Ramzan Kadyrov's[8], pocket to keep Chechnya under control, was a sort of slogan that had caused the Soviet Union to collapse. The Russian nation, Russian history, and Russian language had served as the glue binding all of various the ethnicities of the Soviet Union and today's Russia together. He claimed to desire a democratic, multi-party system, but that his 2011 ban on regional parties would be maintained as it was "a direct path to separatism." (Sakwa 2014b, 141). This message provided the foundation for Putin's vision of Russia that the protests threatened. The Other Russians sought to divide the nation, where Putin sought to unify it.

Putin championed this message throughout his presidential election campaign at rallies and meetings across all sects of Russian society. While Prime Minister, Putin had been active in maintaining his popularity by making such public appearances, but this time his message was more earnest. He must be re-elected as any change to the system would unravel all that had been gained. He conceded that there were still many places where his rule could improve. At a meeting with political scientists on February 6, Sakwa quotes Putin as saying "we are finishing the first steps of the post-Soviet era and can begin making real progress. … Back then [in his previous presidencies] it was just not possible because we had no resources or facilitative conditions" (Sakwa 2014b, 150).

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[8] Former Chechen independence fighter and eventual ally to Russia in the Second Chechen War, Ramzan Kadyrov, has been the *de facto* leader of Chechnya since his father, Akhmad Kadyrov's, assassination in 2004. In 2007, he became the official President of the Chechen Republic, a position he heretofore could not assume due to him being under thirty, the age requirement for the post. He has since dissolved the post and assumed the newly-created position as Head of the Chechen Republic. Chechnya under Kadyrov has been rebuilt from the Chechen Wars, mostly with money coming from the Russian government. Much has been written on Kadyrov's relationship with Putin, the corruption of his government, and the illegal activities in which he has allegedly been involved. For more on this topic see: (Yashin 2016).

At the same time, the opposition was growing. Two days prior to this meeting, protesters gathered in force at different meetings around Moscow. According to protestors' reports, their numbers totaled 175,000 that day. Police reported a total of 30,000 (Lenta 2012). Putin answered with a rally of his own a few days later, albeit one that was staged. Some participants at the rally claimed to have been paid to attend, while others were told that they were being bussed to a folk festival. Whatever the reasons are for the massive attendance at this February 23 meeting, Putin spoke to an audience of 130,000 by police reports. While United Russia had held similar anti-opposition rallies throughout the election cycle, they staged this one just prior to Victory Day over Nazi Germany, and Putin used the occasion to give a passionate speech about patriotism. He had one message for the crowd, that their country was under threat from foreign interference. While never naming an opposition leader, he exclaimed, "We will not allow anyone to interfere in our affairs, to force their will on us. Because we have our own will. We are a victor nation. It's in our genes." He pleaded with listeners "not to look abroad, to scuttle to the side, and not betray their motherland." Near his speech's end, he exclaimed, "[t]he battle for Russia goes on! We will win!" He finished his diatribe against "foreign interference" with a question to the crowd: "I want to ask you – and I want you to give me an unambiguous response, please answer with a simple short word – yes – do we love Russia?" "Yes!" the crowd shouted in response (BBC Russia 2012).

As this blatant attempt to "other" the opposition shows, Putin staged his final campaign push around an "us vs. them" rhetoric. A vote for Putin was a vote for Russia.

A vote for anyone else was a betrayal to your country. Whether he knew it or not at the time, Putin had touched upon a quivering nerve that spread throughout Russia's population. The rhetoric of Russia needing to unite and destroy any impurities within itself set out a chain reaction that, as Masha Gessen puts it, "in barely a year and a half, would transform him from the quintessential post-ideological politician into a man with a mission, an aspiring general in a new worldwide culture war" (Gessen 2012, 307). While this culture war is what the remainder of this thesis details (the blacklist effect being its most recent phase), one of the immediate effects of this nationalistic fervor that Putin tapped into was his victory at the polls.

There are few in the opposition that would consider Putin's victory illegitimate. He had supporters, and they had received this new nationalist rhetoric favorably. The problem was not that he won; it was the *degree* of his victory. As Noize MC, who was active in these protests puts it, "The main problem isn't that Putin won the elections, but that he won with 60% of the vote. It is possible that he won, but I am sure that there would have been a second round if all had been fair. And we would have an entirely different Putin" (yarcube.ru 2012). As has already been described, the opposition only wanted to force Putin into a runoff. With the electoral fraud, what Gessen describes as Putin's "virtual monopoly on the ballot, the media and the polls themselves," and running against what Barry and Schwirtz of *The New York Times* described as "docile, familiar candidates who had already lost to him and his allies repeatedly," the result of the election was never doubted. Instead of allowing for the elections to run their course and

elect Putin as president in a second round runoff as was predicted, "he opted for a landslide." (Barry and Schwirtz 2012; Gessen 2012, 291). By influencing the election to such a degree, Putin had one message to the opposition and the world: "I am in power. I represent my people's interests. All efforts to oppose me in my country are futile." Despite this strong message broadcast by the unbelievable margin of victory in Putin's re-election, the opposition did not give in. Although the "Snow Revolution" was unsuccessful in its bid for honest and fair elections, the strength in numbers showed how many people, and particularly the great number of cultural leaders, who did not support Putin's continuation as president of Russia.

SHAPING A RUSSIAN WORLD

Following the immediate crackdown on protesters following the Putin's inauguration in which authorities arrested hundreds in illegal demonstrations expressing outrage at the Russian President, the great masses that had attended opposition rallies soon dwindled. By the end of 2012, only 2,000 gathered at the last major protest of the year on Lubyanka Square in Moscow. While the waning interest in the protest movement could have been due to the steep fines put into place on anyone found taking part in an unsanctioned protest ($9,000 for participants and $18,000 for organizers), many seemed to have simply lost interest. The core of the protest movement had been made up largely of Russia's middle-class, the ones who had built a comfortable life for themselves in Russia during Putin's reign. While they wanted to live in a free country, they had lives to return to. Only the staunchest supporters of the opposition remained. These last

vanguards of the opposition faced fines, riot police, and arrests (Herszenhorn and Kramer 2012). Putin applied heat and the "Snow Revolution" melted with his inauguration in the spring. Although protests continued into 2013, it was not led with the same optimism of December 2011. The majority of the Russian opposition had resigned itself to at least five more years under Putin.

From his inauguration speech, Putin spelled out what these five years would be like by reaffirming what he had repeated throughout his campaign:

> We will achieve success for sue if we stand firmly upon the solid foundation of our multi-ethnic people's cultural and spiritual traditions, our centuries of history, the values that have always been the moral backbone of our life, and if each of us lives according to their conscience, with love for and faith in their country, their families and loved ones, and care for their children's happiness and their parents' welfare (Putin 2012a).

Through these words, Putin made clear that he wanted to develop the country as a whole, provide for all classes and age groups of Russian society, but that he would only be able to do so with the support and help of the people he planned to serve. He wanted people's faith in him to do what was best for Russia. Just as he had placed himself at the very apex of his "vertical of power" during his first term, he now wanted all Russians to look to him for guidance:

> Russia's interests and the security and prosperity of our people have always been and always will be my utmost priority. I will do everything to justify the trust that millions of our citizens have placed in me. I see the whole sense and purpose of my life as being to serve our country and serve our people, whose support gives me the inspiration and help I need to resolve the greatest and most complex tasks (Putin 2012a).

He was going to lead Russia into the future, and he was validated in this task as the people had elected him in an overwhelming majority that did not require a second round at the polls.

Internet "Security"

In keeping with the words of his inauguration speech, Putin set about strenghthening Russian national security. Putin envisioned tightening Internet security as one major step safeguarding Russian interests. Internet security was now considered a major component of national security. There was a major difference between the political situation President Putin inherited in his first term and the one he did in his third that affected how he was able to govern: the rise of the Internet in Russia. According to statistics from the *World Bank*, only around 1% of Russian citizens used the Internet when Putin assumed the office of interim President in 1999. By 2012, that number had risen to almost 64%. As of 2015, that number is projected to reach three fourths of the population within a few years (World Bank Group 2016). Moreover, among Russian Internet users, 60% consider the Internet a key source for news. While this number is not as high as for television (78%) (Lokot 2016), as the number of Internet users grows, the Net will become more of a threat to a regime that aims to limit alternatives (including alternative viewpoints). Whereas clamping down on television in the early 2000s had involved intimidating or arresting a handful of executives who owned the majority of the Russian TV networks, the Internet is a project of a higher magnitude. While Putin has used underhanded tactics (pressuring businesses to sell or change controlling ownership

to pro-Kremlin representatives) in wresting Russia's most popular website for political news, *lenta.ru*, as well as the most popular social media site in Russia, *VKontakte*, he has only used these strategies sparingly (Lipman 2014). Besides the backlash that abruptly taking over the net would galvanize (especially following the Snow Revolution), a Russia-wide firewall would, if at all similar to the Chinese Golden Shield Project, require tens of thousands of employees to monitor and maintain (Dodson 2010).[9]

All the same, the Internet, and in particular social media, had proven to be a tool that the opposition used effectively against the Putin regime during the Snow Revolution and Putin had found hard to counter. White and McAllister state, "online social networking appears to have been pivotal in advertising the demonstrations, particularly the Bolotnaya Square demonstration (one of the largest of the Revolution) on 10 December, since again these were rarely mentioned in the traditional media until they had actually taken place" (White and McAllister 2013). More than simply making people aware of the demonstrations, the Internet seems to have played a vital role in public opinion towards the fairness of the 2011 Duma elections that started the Snow Revolution. White and McAllister's study found that choice of media played a significant role in shaping people's views on election. The more often a person watched television, the more likely they were to view the elections as fairly conducted. However, contrasting this correlation, the more frequently a person used the Internet, the more likely they were

[9] A system (also known as the Great Firewall) created by the Chinese Communist Party that uses firewalls, gateway controls, and IP address blocking to ban access to certain content and websites from mainland China (Dodson 2010).

to view the elections as unfair (White and McAllister 2013). One of the key elements of creating a "color revolution" that White and McAllister identify is the use of social media to mobilize supporters (White and McAllister 2013).[10] Nearly all of the ingredients were there to predict a 2012 overthrow of the Putin regime with social media being a significant driving force used to coordinate and energize the protests. In short, where TV had threatened Putin's popularity following the sinking of the *Kursk*, the Internet was now the form of media constituting the most serious threat to the security of his post.

The process of clamping down on the net began slowly, at first. Putin needed to be cautious in taking control of the Web. After the opposition forces in Russia had begun to scatter in the months following Putin's third inauguration, the Kremlin could be seen taking tentative steps in trying to understand the problem they faced in the Internet and the steps they could take to counter it. More than representing a threat to Putin in its role as an oppositional platform, it was also the most direct path to reaching young voters.

In 2014, *Russia Today* reported that Russia's Presidential Administration was ordering a study on youth web preferences, especially in regards to how it affected their political opinions. The researchers hired for the job believed that youths trust Internet sources more than official releases or more traditional mass media sources such as television. This statement was later backed up by a 2014 *TNS Rossiya* ratings company

[10] The "color revolutions" were a series of major protests that led to the partial collapse of authoritarianism in post-Soviet republics during the early- to mid- 2000s, most notably in Ukraine and Georgia. Each revolution was associated with a color, Georgia's 2003 act being coined the "Rose Revolution" and Ukraine's 2004 movement the "Orange Revolution." Observers such as White and McAllister have speculated that the Snow Revolution was close to becoming the most recent "successful" color revolution (White and McAllister 2013).

study that showed that far more of the younger generation of Russians use social media than watch state-run television. In a survey of Muscovites ages 12-34, almost twice as many checked their *VKontakte* (Russian-based social media platform, the most popular in Russia) page as watched any of the five main state-run television stations on a daily basis. While this same study found that youths generally used social media to gather information and socialize rather than read news, it still represented a shift away from television and towards the Internet (Egorova 2014). What is also significant about this shift among Russian youths is their attitudes towards censorship. A 2014 *Pew Research Center* study found that 80% of Russians aged 18-29 said that an uncensored Internet was important to them. This same question was answered affirmatively by 72% of those 30-49 and by only 44% of the over 50 age group. The difference between the youngest and oldest generation, 36%, was the largest out of any country surveyed in the study. According to this study, a majority of Russian age groups did not want to see their Internet censored (Nicks 2014; Pew Research Center 2014); the transition to a Kremlin-run Web would need to be a gradual one that allowed for tactical retreats and misdirection.

Although as stated previously, Internet censorship was a goal that the Putin regime approached tentatively, it acted almost immediately following his third inauguration. The Duma passed a law in the summer of 2012 that allowed the government to would allow the government to blacklist without warrant or trial certain websites that contained child pornography, pedophilia, illegal drug use, and suicide.

Although defending the traditional values of Russia on its surface, the hastily constructed legislation created a worrying precedent. “a commenter could post a link to child pornography on a blogger’s page, for example, and the government would have the authority to close down the entire page” one influential blogger commented. “There is little hope that the courts or investigators will be objective,” he worried. Another blogger and director of the Center for Media Research, Alexander Morozov, claimed that the law was so broad that “even vulgar language could be deemed an offense” (Lally 2012) and thus able to be blacklisted. Just as these bloggers feared, a little over year after the law went into effect, Putin signed an amendment to be added to the legislation that would make any site that contained “extremist information” susceptible to be blocked. Extremist information could include “calls for unrest, terrorist activities, or any activities carried out with violations of the established order,” (Lenta 2013) terms vague enough to be used to categorize any sort of anti-government protest activity. The law was eventually used to block opposition sites including: *kasparov.ru, grani.ru, ej.ru*, and opposition leader Alexey Navalny’s *LiveJournal* blog (Roskomnadzor 2014). As the 18-24 age bracket relies on blogs and social media for their news more than the older generations (30% as compared to 18% of all Russian Internet users) (Lokot 2016), the move to censor private bloggers will have a major impact on how the younger generation of Russians view their government leaders.

Although an enormous step in the direction of full Internet censorship, the appendage to the Internet censorship law did not yet establish Putin’s total control of the

Internet. Less than a year following this amendment, a law went into effect in August of 2014 that required all social media bloggers with followings of over 3,000 users to register with the government mass media regulator, *Roskomnadzor* (Russia Today 2014a). This series of legislation also required Internet companies to allow Russian government access to users' information and required social networks to maintain six months of all user activity in servers located on Russian soil. This move would allow Russian government access personal data to all opposition bloggers. Many prominent bloggers managed to cheat the system by means of workarounds such as removing the number of followers from their page (BBC News 2014c). However, despite their efforts, government agencies still found ways to thwart their efforts to provide information and viewpoints alternative to those of the Russian Government.

One of the Kremlin's most frequently used non-legislative tools in countering the opposition's online presence has been their army of "internet trolls." In the suburbs of St. Petersburg exists a 2500-square-meter warehouse, known colloquially as the "troll farm" or "troll factory," where a roughly four-hundred-man workforce comprised primarily of twenty-somethings serve as Putin's online propaganda machine. Although officially run by a retired St. Petersburg police colonel, its former employees and the media who have investigated the troll factory identify it as an entity working for the Russian government

to help frame major news stories (such as the Boris Nemtsov assassination) in a pro-Kremlin light.[11]

Working around the clock in twelve-hour shifts, the trolls pose as bloggers and normal citizens posting content in the form of blogs and comments, to counter oppositional messages that paint the Kremlin or Putin in a negative light (Rezunkov 2015; Walker 2015). On most work days, trolls would be split up into teams of three and given a task, often targeted again Western- or Ukrainian-friendly audiences. After turning on their proxy servers to disguise their locations, "[t]he first one would leave a complaint about some problem or other, or simply post a link, then the other two would wade in, using links to articles on Kremlin-friendly websites and 'comedy' photographs lampooning western or Ukrainian leaders with abusive captions" (Walker 2015). Each of the technical sheets listing their tasks included a news line, information on the subject, and a "conclusion" that the troll was meant to reach in their post. One former worker cited the troll factory's effectiveness as the most frightening thing about the job. The former troll said, "[t]he scariest thing is when you talk to your friends and they are repeating the same things you saw in the technical tasks, and you realise that all this is having an effect," (Walker 2015). Although the propaganda produced in the troll factory

[11] Boris Nemtsov, mentioned earlier in this paper, was a former Prime Minister under Boris Yeltsin, former parliament member, and former mayor of Nizhniy Novgorod. In the past decades, he became a prominent member of the anti-Putin opposition. His assassination on the evening of February 27, 2015 near Red Square in Moscow sent shockwaves throughout the Russian political community with the opposition forming protests and the Putin regime trying to absolve themselves of responsibility for the killing. As the article cited above states, the Kremlin used its troll factory to shed the blame of Nemtsov's murder attempting to pin the act on the opposition (as a form of "provocation") or Ukrainian oligarchs attempting to sour Russian relations with the West (Rezunkov 2015; Yaffa 2016).

is one of the most visible products of the Kremlin's participation in the "information war," there is another tool that has proven itself to be even more effective at influencing domestic political opinions.

Rather than reacting to opposition views and information once they have begun to spread in Russia, the tactic of selectively translating news prevents reports and opinions that the Kremlin finds threatening from ever being exposed to Russian citizens. As this thesis argues, the current war between Russian and Ukraine is a pivotal event that could decide the future of Russia and whether Putin will be a part of it. Putin is using a multi-faceted approach, including censorship of Internet news stories about the war, to ensure that he will remain President of Russia for the foreseeable future. As more and more Russians turn to the Internet for their news (growing from 54% to 60% from 2012 to 2013 alone (Broadcasting Board of GovernorsGallup 2013)), according to the trend in Internet censorship in Russia, one would expect the government to begin banning foreign media outlets on a large scale. This has not happened. Instead, the government works to filter the foreign news stories that Russians can see through selective translation.

Rolf Fredheim of the University of Cambridge did an in-depth work on this phenomenon. Because only 11% of Russians speak English "more or less fluently" and as only one in five Russians who claim fluency can read English text without a dictionary, the Russian populace's access to foreign news is extremely limited; the vast majority may only access it through translation (Fredheim 2015). Although the two leading translators of foreign news into Russian, *InoSMI* and *RT Russian*, rank 8th and 11th most cited

Internet resource in Russia respectfully, their influence is far more powerful. When citing foreign reports, Russian government-controlled media, which includes most newspapers and television broadcasts, cite the translations rather than the original (Fredheim 2015). Authors who use *RT Russian* and *InoSMI*, often refer to them as "foreign mass media" rather than recognizing them for what they are, media outlets with their own editorial priorities (Fredheim 2015). This failure to recognize these foreign press translation entities as independent media is troubling given that the translations of *RT Russian* and *InoSMI* often represent what is far from the original content. *InoSMI's* translations often lack information present in the original, and at times include information not present at all in the foreign news article (Fredheim 2015). While, in general, the translations of *InoSMI* are poorly done and make foreign journalists sound more Russophobic or incoherent, they do generally convey the original article's general message (Fredheim 2015). What is more powerful in discrediting foreign media as biased is in the selection of foreign news sources. By primarily choosing texts that are overly critical of Russia and Putin while refraining from translating more balanced or "bland" articles, Western media is portrayed as biased, ignorant, and unprofessional (Fredheim 2015).

As if restricting the access to information was not enough, Putin has taken steps to restrict access to the Internet in general, or at least monitor more closely who is viewing what. In 2014, Russian officials passed a new law that required all providers of public Wi-Fi to require users to register their passports when accessing the Internet at their hotspot (Dorokhov, Matveeva, and Yuzbekova 2014). While in the same year Putin

claimed that he was not seeking to limit people's access to the Net or to put it under "total control," (BBC Russkaya Sluzhba 2014) by requiring that every Internet user's identity be tied to what they were accessing on the Web, he was essentially making every potential member of the opposition know that he was watching. Although the Moscow metro's Wi-Fi network was originally one of the only places in the nation's capital that did not require registration (Dorokhov, Matveeva, and Yuzbekova 2014; Moskovskij Metropoliten 2014), a January 2015 *Gazeta.ru* article claimed that "Big Brother had reached the metro." The Moscow subway would now require the input of a Russian telephone number to access the network (Kotsar and Bevza 2015). As telephone numbers in Russia require registering a passport, this seemingly innocuous change meant a complete lockdown of the Internet in Moscow.

Just like the law that required all bloggers to register as media sources if they had a following of over 3000, Putin tied tightening down the Internet with national security and the safety of Russian youths. In his most recent moves, Putin has been collaborating with the Chinese government to bring an equivalent to the Great Firewall to Russia. This new security network has been coined the "Red Web" (Soldatov and Borogan 2016). In this new partnership with China, leaders of the pair of countries have cited their nations' right to "digital sovereignty." They claimed that the Internet was ruled by American companies and that the U.S. government had the power to control these companies (Soldatov 2016).

The image of the U.S. government controlling the Internet was evoked by Putin two years prior when he called the Internet a "CIA project" (Rayman 2014). To counter American influence, firewalls need to be used to ensure national security and protect Russia from hackers. In a December 2016 doctrine, Putin has publicly recognized the necessity to protect Russia from misinformation abroad, foreign intelligence agencies, and to minimize the risk of "underdevelopment of domestic technologies (Gerasyukova 2016). One of the proposed new security measures would include a "white list" of government-approved domain names that would remain the only ones accessible within Russia (Soldatov 2016). While this drastic step has not yet gone into effect, the trend towards Internet censorship does not bode well for the future of freedom of speech in Russia.

Sochi Olympics

Apart from buffing up Internet security, another of the "complex tasks" Putin mentioned in his inauguration address was planned for less than two years after he took office: The Winter Olympics in Sochi. As with all Olympic Games, Russia would be on the world stage, and it needed to be ready. When Russia bid for the 2014 Sochi Olympics in 2007, Putin cited the amount of money that his country was willing to spend on the Games as a point of pride. At that time, he pledged twelve billion dollars towards construction, far surpassing the other countries bidding (Yaffa 2014). However, due to many complications that resulted from placing the Games in Sochi, an underdeveloped port town that was a popular vacation spot during the Soviet Union, this amount rose

significantly. Lucrative development contracts were given out to companies with ties to the government including Gazprom, discussed in the previous chapter. By the time the Olympic facilities were ready, Sochi had become the most expensive Olympic Games to date at over fifty-one billion dollars (Yaffa 2014). It certainly paid to be friends with Putin.

Aside from the enormous bill and the rampant corruption throughout the preparation for the Olympic Games as Russians in Sochi bustled to put up a clean, modern façade, there was another stain that needed clearing prior to the big event: Putin's political prisoners. The press in Western countries had long been following the story of Pussy Riot, the all-female punk feminist group that had been arrested for their performance of their protest song "Mother of God, Send Putin Away!" during the Snow Revolution in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral. While they were charged with "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred," their song included nothing negative about Christian religious figures. As the name of the song suggests, Pussy Riot's performance targeted Putin (naming him a dictator) and the Russian Orthodox Church's support for him in his reelection campaign. Two of the group's five members were sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Western media picked up on the story and demanded that the sentences be overturned as they were overly harsh. As the Olympics neared, Putin wanted to do everything possible to attract crowds to Sochi. In order to make Russia seem open and as a place that respects human rights, the two imprisoned members of Pussy Riot, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina, were given amnesty by the State Duma

twenty-one months in to their sentence and less than two months prior to the Olympic opening ceremony.

Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina were not the only prisoners the authorities freed prior to Sochi. Three days before Pussy Riot were released, Mikhail Khordorkovsky, having served nine of his ten-year sentence in a prison near the Arctic Circle, was granted clemency by Putin. The Russian President cited reasons of Khordorkovsky having already served a significant part of his sentence as well as him asking for mercy in order to spend time with his sick mother. Putin pardoned Khordorkovsky (and Pussy Riot) because he no longer viewed him (or them) as a political threat (Anishchuk and Heritage 2013). With his company in government hands and the majority of his former colleagues either bought or buried, Khordorkovsky was free to go. While Khordorkovsky continues to write an opposition blog, he does so from abroad. Immediately upon Khordorkovsky's release and subsequent departure to Germany, Russian authorities issued another arrest warrant, this time accusing the former oligarch of paying subordinates to murder Vladimir Petukhov, a former mayor of a Siberian oil town. Khordorkovsky categorically denies this charge (Shapovalova 2015). Effectively sealing Khordorkovsky outside of Russia, the former Yukos head no longer constitutes a serious threat to the regime. This method of appearing benevolent on the surface by pardoning Khordorkovsky but at the same time disabling his ability to threaten the regime is one Putin uses in similar situations to present day. Just like allowing *TV Rain*, the independent television, to continue to operate, Putin allows for "others," but only those that have been neutralized

and given a sterilized space to operate far from a place where they could cause damage to the Russian President's image.

Besides neutralizing "others," Putin also co-opts them, effectively splitting their population into pro-government and anti- or non- governmental factions. One example of this co-opting can be seen at the Sochi Olympics in the form of a pop concert of the most internationally successful Russian act ever, the faux-lesbian pop group t.A.T.u featuring singers Yulia Volkova and Lena Katina. This choice of performers for the Olympics was an interesting one as it came on the tail-end of a year-long war against homosexuality in Russia following Putin's third inauguration in May 2012. The LGBT community proved to be an immediate target as Putin immediately banned gay pride parades in Russia until 2112 following his inauguration. This move sparked outrage from groups like Human Rights First and Western media such as *The Atlantic* who called the ban an "idiotic gesture" (Clemons 2012). However, it was not until a year later that the real slap in the face of human rights came.

On July 30, 2013, Putin signed a law that protected "religious convictions and feeling of citizens against insults" to ensure that there would not be a repeat of the Pussy Riot protest. On this same day, he also signed a law to protect "children from information harmful to their health and development (…) that promotes negation of traditional family values" (Kremlin.ru 2013a; 2013b). As Putin saw it, he was fulfilling his promise to the people of Russia to protect the children and traditional values of the nation. On the

surface, the law bans "homosexual propaganda" or anything that could influence a young child's mind into believing that alternative lifestyles are acceptable.

This ban makes sense as the homosexual community made for an easy target. In a 2013 survey by the *Levada Center*, when asked to define homosexuality, only 16% of responders answered "a sexual orientation from birth, which merits the same rights as heterosexual orientation." A far great percentage, 34% of responders, answered "an illness, which must be medically treated. The other two highest responses were: "The result of a bad upbringing; promiscuity; bad habits" (17%) and "[t]he result of sexual seduction or abuse" (23%). This same study reported that a majority of Russians, 60% of responders, believed that the primary motivation behind enacting the ban on homosexual propaganda was a "concern for the population's morals; strengthening moral values" (Levada Center 2015a). By enacting this ban on the LGBT community, Putin was once again limiting alternatives and suppressing the "other" within his country.

Why, then, did the government request t.A.T.u, made famous for their girl-on-girl kissing scene in the 2001 music video "I've Lost my Mind" (*Ya soshla s uma*), to perform at prior to the Olympic opening ceremony? In the colorful words of Amy Zimmerman of *The Daily Beast,* "Because t.A.T.u, a gimmicky, early 2000's pop duo, is literally the most internationally recognizable musical act in all of Russia," they serve as a direct contrast to the ballet and Tchaikovsky, showing that Russia does have "'modern' 'artists'" (Zimmerman 2014). In addition to their contemporary nature, the girls of t.A.T.u. served another function.

Prior to the Games, countries and Olympic delegations around the world threatened boycott due to the "anti-gay propaganda" law. Fifty Olympic athletes and over 400,000 of the world's citizens signed a petition demanding that all anti-gay laws be eliminated and gay rights be protected in Russia. Putin responded to these protests by stating that all gay athletes should "feel safe" at Sochi given that they "leave kids alone" (Dougherty 2014). In addition to this admittedly lackluster reassurance, by choosing t.A.T.u., Putin was signaling that gay people, including gay athletes, would be welcome and safe at Sochi. By choosing t.A.T.u to represent contemporary Russian culture, Putin showed that he understood the power a concert can have, the power of symbols, and once again the importance of allowing a limited set of alternatives to exist in a governmentally-sanctioned space.

The faux-lesbian duo (faux, as both girls today claim to be heterosexual (Levkovich and Grinshpun 2013; Mosbergen 2014)) did not sing "I've Lost my Mind," or the English equivalent "All the Things She Said," which had skyrocketed them to international recognition in 2002. Instead, they performed in Russian "*Nas ne dogonyat*" ("Not Gonna Get Us"), a 2001 song from their debut album *200 [km/h] Against the Traffic* (*200 Po Vstrechnoy)* that any person familiar with the pop group also knew. Rather than excusing their homosexuality by way of claiming mental illness as could be inferred from the lyrics and song title of "I've Lost My Mind," as also apparent from the song lyrics and title, the girls in "*Nas ne dogoynyat*" do not apologize for their homosexual relationship, preferring instead to run away from a society that rejects them.

Although it is possible to derive from this choice of song a message of the Russian government tolerating homosexuals as long as they are not "caught" broadcasting their homosexuality, what is more relevant is the choice of t.A.T.u. for the opening ceremonies. Although nominally representing the LGBT community as they had a decade prior, for any gay person in Russia looking t.A.T.u. for reassurance, they would see nothing but a cheap "token" act provided with the intent to deceive.

Although Lena Katina has still been a strong supporter of the LGBT community, performing in gay clubs around the world and saying that to her, being gay was not a sin, this stance on homosexuality was not shared by both members of the pop group (Karlsson 2009). Within two weeks of the group's performance, in a video on her YouTube channel, Lena Katina announced that would no longer collaborate with Volkova and that the group would remain disbanded as they had been for years prior to the preparations for the Olympics (Pate 2009). While this created little stir in the international music community, Yulia Volkova's anti-gay remarks on a Ukrainian TV show in September of that same year did among the LGBT community that had supported t.A.T.u for over a decade. Upon being asked if she would disown a gay son, Volkova answered, "Yes" following by claiming that a man has "no right to be a faggot." In what could be seen as a defense of her involvement in t.A.T.u she claimed that "lesbians look aesthetically much nicer" (KRS-One 2003)

This comment sharply contrasts what she said in a 2006 interview: "Our slogan is to love and it's not important whom to love (…) We want to say that a boy can love a boy

and a girl can love a girl (Feyh 2016, 36). Although Volkova's 2014 comments are much safer than those she made in 2006 given the current political climate in Russia, they are a disappointment to many former-t.A.T.u fans, one of whom said "[g]ood to know one of my idols is a complete homophobe despite being a beacon of home for LGBT in Russia" (Bad Balance 2012). Although it is doubtful that Putin gave Volkova a script to use on the Ukrainian talk show, her words reflect the regime's line on homosexuality. As the "homosexual propaganda" law has been used against artists in Russia (such as an incident involving Lyudmila Ulitskaya detailed in the next chapter), Volkova, who unlike Katina still lives and performs in Russia (to pursue her solo career Katina relocated to Los Angeles), likely made a wise career move by publicly stating her anti-LGBT stance. Because of her performance at the Olympics, the Putin regime had confused LGBT opposition who did not know what to make of the move, allowing for a thin, false veneer to cover the oppression against LGBT in the country to help welcome international homosexual athletes and visitors (and their money) to Sochi. Putin coopted t.A.T.u, whose members had been tightly embraced by the LGBT community for over a decade, in order to balance his domestic repression with his desire for international recognition as a modern country. As the Sochi Olympics came to a close, Games that had more-or-less achieved the Putin regime's objectives of displaying as an international power and home of a great culture, another major world event was just about to occur across the Black Sea in Crimea.

START OF THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS

Throughout the final months of preparation for the Sochi Olympics in Russia, Ukraine was in the midst of internal upheaval. Reminiscent of the 2005 Orange Revolution that had forced a recount of presidential voting, overturning the first count that had elected Russian-leaning Viktor Yanukovych as President of Ukraine, Euromaidan was a revolution whose participants sought to unseat Yanukovych (this time democratically elected) and install a new government. In November 2013, President Yanukovych refused to sign a European Union Association Agreement that had finally passed the Ukrainian Duma five years after talks began. The decision to veto this proposed agreement was a huge slap in the face of the pro-European population of Ukraine, the majority of which lives in Western Ukraine and the capital, Kiev.

On November 21, crowds began to gather on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kiev to demand closer ties with Europe and the resignation of Yanukovych and his government. After police attempted to disperse the crowds using violent means on November 30, the revolution grew at an exponential rate, soon numbering in the hundreds of thousands in Kiev and tens of thousands across Ukraine. As Russia continued to prepare for the Olympic Games in Sochi throughout the beginning of 2014, Yanukovych was seeing his support quickly unravel. Proof of terrible corruption that included his multi-million-dollar villa and transferring millions of state funds into the hands of his friends led Transparency International's "Unmask the Corrupt" campaign to vote Yanukovych the most visible example of grand corruption in the world (Rhymes Sho 2015). Due to this proof of corruption, police brutality, and the

stated goals of the protesters for democracy and freedom, Euromaidan received international media attention and support. Russia's hands were tied as Putin tried to show Western countries that Russia was a defender of human rights by releasing Pussy Riot and Khordorkovsky shortly after the Euromaidan protests began. Yanukovych was on his own.

On February 22, after months of protest and eventual bloodshed between police and protesters in which hundreds died from sniper fire, Yanukovych fled Ukraine to seek asylum in Russia. Days prior, the Kremlin had held an all-night meeting with security services to discuss how to extricate the Ukrainian President. At the end of this meeting, Putin, in his own words, claims to have said "we must start working on returning Crimea to Russia" (Super 2016). On the day following Yanukovych's extrication, February 23, the Sochi Olympics held its closing ceremony. Four days later, on February 27, unidentified (but whom Putin later confirmed to be Russian (Mdzinarishvili 2014)) special forces (also known as "little green men" due to their green uniforms being the only way to identify them; they only claimed to be Crimean "self-defense forces"(Mdzinarishvili 2014; Shuster 2014)) seized the Crimean Parliament building, leading to the Crimean Parliament to replace the current local government with those of the Russian Unity party (Shuster 2014).

On March 17, less than three weeks after the Crimean takeover by the "little green men" who refused to identify what country they served (although they refused in Russian), Russia Today reported an overwhelming 96.77 percent of the Crimean

population had voted to join the Russian Federation with a voter turnout of 83.1 percent (Arkhiv Muziykal'nogo Televideniya 2016). Although these numbers and the election results were highly disputed by the Russian opposition and Western election watchdogs (Baer 2015; Somin 2014), Crimea was now part of Russia. With the "little green men" of the Russian special forces as well as the Russian navy base at Sevastopol, there was little chance of Ukraine getting it back.

Within two weeks of the announcement on Crimea's choice to join Russia, on April 7, separatists in the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts of eastern Ukraine occupied government buildings. On May 11, they declared independence of their "people's republics. Unofficially supported by the Russian military that had begun to amass on the Russian-Ukrainian border funneling supplies and troops into the breakaway republics, the pro-Russian insurgents waged war with the post-Maidan Ukrainian military (BBC News 2015c). This war continues to this day. Although there have been numerous ceasefires and peace talks, the situation remains locked in a state that looks very similar to how it did in 2014. Ukraine claims that Russia is attempting to regain its sphere of influence from the Soviet days by illegally annexing parts of Ukraine as it did in Crimea. Russia claims that it is defending the interests of ethnic Russians who live in eastern Ukraine and are having their rights violated by the illegally established "junta" that was put into place after the illegal ousting of the democratically-elected Yanukovych.

Most recently in the name of the defense of ethnic Russians, Russia has recognized the passports of Donetsk and Lugansk as "legitimate" (Russia Today 2017).

By recognizing Donetsk and Lugansk passports, Putin is, in effect, undermining Ukraine's sovereignty. Putin used a similar tactic in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (regions of Georgia that have claimed independence but are *de facto* controlled by Russia) following a 2002 citizenship law that simplified the process for former Soviet citizens to become Russian citizens. As Andrew Johnston stated in his master's thesis that detailed this phenomenon, the strength of one's passport is traditionally seen as a tool of soft power. However, as Johnston mentions, Putin is able to use "passportization," or granting Russian passports to citizens of other countries, in a manner that smacks of coercion, a characteristic of hard power (A. Johnston 2010).

The recognition of Lugansk and Donetsk passports shows a similar blend or hybridization of soft and hard power resources. If the strategy of "passportization" proves as effective in Eastern Ukraine as it did in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, we could see a resulting frozen conflict that leaves Lugansk and Donetsk as semi-autonomous states that are controlled by Russia. As this chapter has shown through its examination of Putin's silencing domestic opposition and pandering to the international community, the Russian President is an expert at blending his soft and hard power resources, forming a uniquely Russian smart power. The rest of this thesis will examine how Putin and the Russian government manipulate hard and soft power, both internationally and domestically, to increase negative soft power resources. These negative soft power resources are used to maintain Putin's hold on power in Russia. The next chapter will detail "the blacklist

effect," a wave of repression on Russian cultural elites who espoused pro-Ukrainian views following the annexation of Crimea.

Chapter 4: The Blacklist Effect

Let us now turn back to the question posed in the introduction of this thesis involving the concert cancellations that plagued Noize MC following his performance at a music festival in Lviv, Ukraine in 2014. Why did the one performance in Lviv have such far-reaching effects? The answer to this question revolves around the location and political climate where this concert occurred. The music festival in Lviv took place in August of 2014, a time when Ukrainian officials were openly accusing Russia of sending troops and aid to rebels fighting the separatist war in eastern Ukraine described in the previous chapter. Many of the Russian performers scheduled to give concerts at the festival withdrew prior to its scheduled opening day. Andreev was one of the few big-name Russian acts to remain in the festival's lineup. Noize MC did not.

Noize MC represents a subset of popular Russian entertainers, almost exclusively consisting of Russian nationals and citizens of former Soviet republics, who have faced governmental and social backlash after either actively voicing dissenting political views or engaging in activities that could be viewed as resistance to governmental policies. The most common point of contention amongst this new wave of outspoken cultural elites has been Russia's recent military intervention in Ukraine. In the case of Andreev, his rapping "Tanzy" and wearing the Ukrainian national flag at his concert was portrayed by the majority of State-owned Russian media as a betrayal; many considered these acts to be a show of support for the neighboring Slavic state locked in complex conflict with Russia. (Demirjian 2014)

Substantial scholarship explores the topic of Russian President Vladimir Putin's cultural policy, and opposition to this policy by members of the cultural elite. However, most of this scholarship centers on the 2011-2013 protests sparked by the campaign and inauguration of Putin's third presidential term. This new wave of suppression of cultural elites such as Noize MC, who have been outspoken in their views against Russian involvement in Ukraine, is a continuation of the Culture War that began with these protests. While scholars, journalists, and other opponents of Putin's, such as Masha Gessen, have detailed the government's response to significant cultural events surrounding the 2011-2013 protests such as the arrest and detention of Pussy Riot, scholarship has not yet covered the developments in the most recent phase of this cultural conflict concerning resistance to Russian involvement in Ukraine. I refer to this wave of governmentally initiated suppression originally generated by opposition to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 as the "blacklist effect." In order to reflect the scope of the blacklist effect, this chapter will focus on the period of 2014-2015 when the blacklist effect was a new phenomenon.

In the same way that a blacklist denies those whose names appear on it access to services, recognition, work, or other privileges depending on the context, the Russian artists who oppose Russian military intervention in Ukraine are repeatedly and systematically barred from appearing publicly before large crowds, painted as "traitors" by the majority of Russian press especially governmentally-controlled television, and as a consequence are ostracized from significant constituencies of Russian society, primarily

those who support the Putin government and its foreign policy. Many of my sources analyze the strong-arm tactics employed by the government and emulated by many members of the public, with the period following the annexation of Crimea in February 2014 as a focus. Due to the recent developments connected to this struggle amongst members of the cultural elite concerning the conflict in Ukraine, most of my research concerning this particular phase of the ongoing cultural conflict comes from newspaper reports and interviews with these artists conducted by journalists both in Russia and abroad. My research focuses on members of repressed cultural elite in music, literature, and radio/television in order to explore the specific details of repression and how they differ in various cultural realms in order to demonstrate that though this backlash may come in a variety of forms, it is pervasive throughout all major areas of the Russian cultural sphere.

The existence of the blacklist effect is significant because: 1) it is initiated by the government, a claim that will be substantiated through my analysis; 2) it demonstrates that Putin is aware of the influence celebrities wield in Russia; and 3) that he considers it necessary to counter these celebrities' shows of support for Ukraine. This final point leads to an additional, intriguing question: why is suppressing pro-Ukrainian views necessary to the current administration? When the current political climate is superficially observed, this suppression does not seem necessary at first glance. The Russian President currently enjoys an incredibly high approval rating, currently hovering at 85%, and as of November 2015, according to a poll conducted by the Levada-Center,

87% of Russian citizens believe that Crimea should continue to be a part of the Russian Federation (Levada-Center 2015a; Levada-Tsentr 2015b). Despite Putin's popularity, artists who broadcast views casting Russian military intervention in a negative light continue to suffer from the aforementioned blacklist effect. The unwavering nature of this repression implies that maintaining a positive societal perception on the conflict in Ukraine is vital to Putin and his regime. With the Russian economy faltering, Western sanctions continuing to restrict foreign trade, and Russia locked in two foreign wars, maintaining public support for Russian involvement in Ukraine is imperative to sustaining Putin's high approval ratings. If these influential artists were allowed to broadcast their dissenting views and possibly sway public opinion on military intervention in Ukraine, the current regime could lose the main support structure that their approval and authority relies on. This is why the blacklist effect exists; without it, thus leaving these outspoken artists unchecked, the Putin administration's long held grip on power would be put in jeopardy. To lend credence to this claim of the importance of the blacklist effect, it must be first understood and demonstrated just how important a positive societal perception to the conflict in Ukraine is to President Putin's popularity.

OVERVIEW OF PUTIN'S APPROVAL RATING

With every new article that appears reporting on conflict in Ukraine and Syria, police crackdowns of peaceful protests in Moscow, and most recently tensions with Turkey over Russian violation of its airspace, the U.S. press continues to portray President Vladimir Putin as a hard-fisted, war-mongering dictator who leads his nation

with an unmitigated form of authoritarianism. Due to Russian opposition rallies and ballot stuffing garnering wide news coverage in the United States during Russia's most recent presidential election, it is easy for many in the West to forget that the current regime enjoys an approval rating of over eighty percent, a statistic that denotes the Russian president's widespread public support (Levada-Center 2015a). This number is not inflated, either; polls and surveys continue to show that a majority of Russian citizens genuinely approve of and trust their president (Levada-Center 2016). This finding, then, prompts the question: how does Vladimir Putin maintain his high approval rating while the Russian economy continues to deteriorate and the country is involved in two foreign conflicts in Ukraine and Syria?

An economic boom occurred early on during Putin's first term thanks in large part to Russia's vast oil reserves and a sustained increase in global oil prices (Judah 2013). According to research of Daniel Treisman, the key to Putin's high approval rating over the course of his first three terms (two as president and one as prime minister) has been the state of the Russian economy (Treisman 2011). However, more recently, Putin has not been able to rely on the state of the economy to maintain his high approval ratings due to the ongoing Russian financial crisis that resulted from the Russian ruble's collapse(bloomberg.com 2017; Weisenthal and Kitroeff 2014) caused primarily by a sudden, steep decline in oil prices in 2014 and economic sanctions imposed by Western countries following Russia's military intervention in Crimea (Weisenthal and Kitroeff 2014). Despite this financial crisis that has adversely affected the average Russian

citizen's quality of life, the Russian president's approval rating remains virtually unchanged (dAmora 2014; Levada-Center 2015a). In the past, Putin's approval ratings have spiked when the president has struck upon patriotic themes such as with the restoration of the Soviet-era national anthem and dispatching troops into Georgia in 2008 (Treisman and Dmitriev 2012). According to Daniel Treisman and as is indicated in the surge of Putin's approval rating following the annexation of Crimea, Russians see Putin as a leader who is standing up to the West and making Russia strong again (Levada-Tsentr 2015a; Treisman 2011). Treisman posits that renewed national pride can serve to buoy Putin's approval rating during times of economic hardship (Treisman 2011).

There are, however, many sides to consider when analyzing Russian public opinion concerning the conflict in Ukraine. To start, according to a study done by the Pew Research Center in 2015, the vast majority (88%) of Russians have confidence in Putin in handling international affairs such as with the U.S. and EU (Poushter 2015). Regarding the conflict in Ukraine itself, while it is well known that Russian troops were used in policing elections in Crimea, 65-70% of Russians categorically deny that Russia and Ukraine are involved in a war against each other despite seemingly insurmountable evidence to the contrary covered extensively in Western press (Levada-Tsentr 2015b; Tsvetkova 2015; Weiss and Miller 2014). Another poll reported a plurality of respondents (38%) that claimed that while there likely were Russian militia and military equipment in eastern Ukraine, given the current geopolitical situation, it was the right policy for Russia to deny this fact (Levada-Center 2015b). This finding speaks once

again to the Russian populace's faith that their leaders are correctly handling their international affairs. What does this continued support for the Putin administration's actions towards the conflict in Ukraine rely upon? As previously mentioned, the wars with Chechnya and Georgia initially boosted Putin's approval ratings; however, what was not mentioned was that these effects were short-lived, eventually leading to a net negative effect on the president's popularity (Treisman 2011). How then, if popularity boosts caused by wars are short-lived, does the military intervention in Ukraine, going on its fourth year, remain so popular? To address this question, I again turn to recent polls conducted by the Levada Center, Russia's leading non-partisan polling center, which help to shed light on this phenomenon.

As has been established, the Russian populace approves of their perceived level of involvement their country has in Ukraine. While it is true that Western and Russian media differ on their portrayals on the degree of Russian involvement in Ukraine, a much larger discrepancy exists in societal perceptions on the causes of the conflict in Ukraine. Where a plurality of NATO countries and a majority of Ukrainians blamed Russia for the current conflict, half of the Russian population blamed Western countries, around a quarter blamed the current government in Kiev, and perhaps most importantly, only a miniscule 2% of Russians named their own nation as the primary cause of the conflict (Poushter 2015). These figures show that the vast majority of the Russian population does not consider themselves or their government responsible for the conflict in Ukraine; in other words, to the Russian populace, their nation is not the aggressor in the Ukrainian

Crisis. A poll conducted in November of this year further supported the pervasiveness of this belief in Russian society. It reported that only 29% of Russians believe that Ukraine's push for closer relations with Europe and distancing themselves from Russia was rooted in Ukraine's desire to bring their country democracy, prosperity, and freedom. A much larger number, 49% of those polled, believed that "Ukraine has become a marionette in the hands of the West and the US, leading to its anti-Russian policies" (Levada-Tsentr 2015c).

In addition, in April of 2015, 56% of Russians polled stated that the conflict in eastern Ukraine was continuing due to "leadership in the US and other Western countries [who] needs this conflict to place blame on Russia and restrain Russia's growth and influence in the world and elevate their own ideals" (Levada-Center 2015b). The idea that Kiev is being controlled by the U.S. is one that originated from Russian government news sources and has appeared in the speeches of President Putin himself. In September of 2015, while attending talks in New York concerning conflict in Syria, the Russian President said, "Concerning the possibility of a more active participation by the U.S. in regulating the conflict in Ukraine, the United States is already participating actively enough, although this does not extend to the forefront" (Official Site of the President of Russia 2015).

While not explicitly calling the Kievan government, or the "junta" as the Kremlin refers to it, as a "marionette," most Russians are familiar with the concept of the Ukrainian government being a U.S.-controlled puppet as many members of the Putin

administration disseminate it. For example, Sergey Glazyev, one of Putin's economic advisors, was reported saying in June 2014, "SBU (Russian abbreviation for the Security Service of Ukraine) is now a criminal organization and its leadership - is entirely controlled by the American secret services. That is an organization that creates lawlessness in Ukraine, commits a crime against the Ukrainian people" (Pravda.ru 2014).

Because of the widespread prevalence of these views of the U.S. as puppeteers of the Kievan government, any involvement by Russian forces in the conflict in Ukraine is viewed by the majority of the nation as a conflict not against the nation of Ukraine, but against the masters that they perceive to control the Kievan government's strings, the U.S. and the West. While the quotes from Putin and Glazyev indicate that the government supports the position that America is heavily involved in the inner workings of the Ukrainian state, why do so many Russian citizens accept this State-driven narrative as fact? The answer to this question lies in the types of news sources Russians use to inform themselves about the conflict in Ukraine.

Societal Dependence on State-Supported Media

Although Russia is a highly literate nation just as the USSR before it, like its Soviet predecessor, it continues to widely engage in censorship. Putin has used the media to further his interests since before he became President of Russia. White, Oates, and McAllister concluded that Putin won his first presidential election in 2000 due to media, "particularly state television, which operated under the direct control of the Kremlin" (White, OATES, and McAllister 2005). Putin's manipulation of the media led Freedom

House, a Washington-based NGO that measures civil liberties and political rights, to give Russian press an abysmal score of 83/100 (0 being the most free) in their the category "Freedom of the Press," leading the well-respected institution to declare the press of the Russian Federation in 2015 "Not Free" (Freedom House 2015). Their study found that across all forms of media, independent or objective news coverage of the conflict in Ukraine led to official pressure from government officials (Freedom House 2015). In October of 2015, *Roskomnadzor*, Russia's federal executive body responsible for overseeing media, issued a warning to *Ekho Moskvy*, one of Russia's last remaining independent radio stations, for broadcasting "information justifying war crimes" after the station aired first-hand accounts of the fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine (Freedom House 2015). However, although the incident with *Ekho Moskvy* stopped with the warning, negative attention from *Roskomnadzor* can lead to serious consequences.

Earlier in 2015, when *Lenta.ru*, one of Russia's most popular news websites, published an interview with the leader of the Ukrainian nationalist group *Pravyi Sektor* (Right Sector), they, too, received a warning from *Roskomnadzor*. On the next day, the website's owner fired its editor, Galina Timchenko, and replaced her with Alexei Goreslavskij, a media executive who had previously directed a pro-government news outlet (Freedom House 2015). Although these accounts paint a grim picture for freedom of the press in Russia and serve to demonstrate some of the ways that government pressure can affect independent news outlets, this control of the media by the state is

much more prevalent in television, where the majority of Russian citizens receive their news on local and international topics including the conflict in Ukraine (FOMnibus 2013; Levada-Tsentr 2014). In *Kremlin Rising,* Peter Baker and Susan Glasser recounted the 2002 government seizure of NTV, one of Russia's most popular television channels (Baker and Glasser 2005, 94-98). After this seizure, television channels continued to be taken over by the government eventually leading to today's state of Russian press, in which all major TV channels are either run directly by the State or owned by companies with close ties to the Kremlin (Baker and Glasser 2005, 95-98; BBC News 2015b).

Despite this continued suppression of independent news sources, statistics show that Russians continue to watch state-controlled television and trust the reliability of its information, a trend that continues concerning news coverage on the conflict in Ukraine (Levada-Tsentr 2014). A Levada Center study conducted at the end of last year found that 59% of the Russian population believed that federally controlled news outlets provided an objective portrayal of events in Ukraine with 37% claiming that they relied solely on federal channels for information involving the situation in Ukraine. A plurality of this latter group of respondents (26%) reported a belief that alternative accounts on events in Ukraine not reported through federal channels were "anti-Russian propaganda." Perhaps most surprising is that only 12% of respondents claimed to regularly consult non-federal news sources for information on Ukraine (Levada-Tsentr 2014).

What these figures indicate is that a majority of Russians receive their news primarily through a one-sided and biased lens. A 2015 report on Russian television

funded by the European Union published the following findings: television is the most efficient method of influencing opinion in EaP countries (former Soviet republics and satellite states), all major televised news sources are one-sided, particularly in respect to the conflict in Ukraine, and the main Russian channels, First Channel, Russia 1, and previously mentioned NTV, "have been used as instruments of propaganda in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, diverting attention from important domestic issues and challenges and instead focusing on the conflict in Ukraine" (EaP Civil Society Forum Secretariat, European Endowment for Democracy, Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji 2015). In addition to these findings, this study gathered evidence that demonstrated that the main television stations in Russia devote "extensive prime time news coverage to the activities of the authorities focusing primarily on the activities of the president and the government." This news coverage particularly highlighted authorities' "achievements and successes (…) [while] neglecting to offer any independent and alternative views or critical reporting challenging the performance of the authorities" (EaP Civil Society Forum Secretariat, European Endowment for Democracy, Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji 2015). Regarding the view of the U.S. as controlling the government in Kiev, the EU-funded study found that, "[a] significant level of hostility towards specific actors was perpetuated invariably on the three channels (First Channel, Russia 1, NTV) and *Russia Today*. In particular, the Ukrainian authorities were presented as the ones guilty of the disastrous situation in the Eastern part of Ukraine while the U.S. administration was presented as being interested in maintaining the conflict in the region" (EaP Civil Society

Forum Secretariat, European Endowment for Democracy, Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji 2015).

The study also found that the most popular Russian news channels sought to expose "the aggressive plans of the West, particularly of the USA" and justify the conflict in Ukraine as "the struggle of Russians in Ukraine for the 'ancestral Russian lands" (EaP Civil Society Forum Secretariat, European Endowment for Democracy, Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji 2015). On portraying the conflict, the study noted that, "As a rule, the media selected their sources in a way to present only one position that is the position of the Russian authorities" (EaP Civil Society Forum Secretariat, European Endowment for Democracy, Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji 2015). In sum, these findings found that coverage on the conflict in Ukraine was covered extensively, ignoring news on the economy, and that all major news sources sought to "demonize US and Ukrainian authorities," portraying the heads of the Ukrainian government as Western puppets and Russia as "protector of Russian citizens in the conflict zone" (EaP Civil Society Forum Secretariat, European Endowment for Democracy, Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji 2015). Therefore, the narrative that dominated Russian news during early 2015 suggested that, by intervening in Ukraine, Russia was protecting itself against the enemy and "a possible Western plot against Russia." Regarding this plot, "virtually every program contained stories about Russia's readiness for such situations" (EaP Civil Society Forum Secretariat, European Endowment for Democracy, Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji 2015). What is

important to note as well is that "the one-month long monitoring confirmed that the identified problems in the main Russian channels were not result of short-term anomalies but reflect real trends" (EaP Civil Society Forum Secretariat, European Endowment for Democracy, Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji 2015). Overall, these problems stemmed from the fact that "the interests of the current Russian authorities and not the interests of the readers or viewers determine the editorial policy of these channels" (EaP Civil Society Forum Secretariat, European Endowment for Democracy, Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji 2015).

What does this stranglehold on television and thereby news coverage on the Ukrainian conflict by the Russian state signify? Furthermore, what is its connection to the blacklist effect? In short, because it is crucial for the Putin administration that the state's version of the conflict in Ukraine be accepted by the general public, those that offer an alternative (i.e. negative) view on the situation in Ukraine threaten the president's approval ratings and the regime's public support. By monopolizing television, and thereby controlling the way most Russians receive news coverage on the conflict in Ukraine, the state is able to portray the conflict as a defensive war fought against Western Ukrainian leaders controlled by the West and the U.S. This control of television also allows the state to broadcast misinformation about blacklisted (entertainers experiencing the blacklist effect), discrediting their names and working to ruin their reputations without giving these artists an opportunity to defend themselves. Because the press, radio, and Internet are forms of media less dominated by the State (when compared to

television), blacklisted use these forums, particularly *Novaya Gazeta* (New Newspaper), *Ekho Moskviy (*Echo of Moscow), and *New Times,* to broadcast their views on the conflict in Ukraine and state repression (Shenderovich 2015b). However, because of the overwhelming popularity of television in Russia, and the stranglehold that the government has on this medium, the state's voice is often the only one heard by much of the Russian population. Putin and his current administration can curb the impact on public opinion that these influential entertainers could potentially have if they were allowed to voice their opposition to Russian military involvement in Ukraine unchecked. By portraying entertainers who reject the State-offered version of events in Ukraine as "traitors," the government not only offers a warning to others who could potentially speak out against the current administration's policy in Ukraine, but also encourages those who support or fear the current regime to shun these outspoken artists, thereby contributing to the blacklist effect.

BLACKLIST BACKGROUND

Putin seeking a third presidential term was a move that was considered unconstitutional a decade prior when Yeltsin's second term neared its end (Pellegrini 1997). However, months prior to the completion of Putin's long-time political partner Dmitri Medvedev's first term as the President of Russia, the official head of the Russian state at that time presented a bill supported by Prime Minister Putin that proposed allowing for a third presidential term on the condition that these terms were not consecutive (Partlett 2012). This move led to massive multi-faction protests involving

thousands of Russian citizens primarily concentrated in the nation's two largest cities, Moscow and Saint Petersburg (Barry 2011). Although these protests were among the largest ever held in Russia, support for the anti-Putin Russian opposition began to dwindle following Putin's re-election in early 2012, due largely to doubt by protestors that change was possible in the near future. By the end of that same year, similar anti-Putin protests led by the same protestors that had attracted hundreds of thousands of supporters prior to Putin's inauguration had been reduced to a few thousand mostly comprised of the opposition's most devoted members and leaders (Weaver and Clover 2012). However, soon after in the beginning of 2014, Crimea breathed new life into the Russian opposition's struggling anti-Putin cause.

While the annexation of Crimea was supported by a majority of the Russian population, boosting Putin's approval rating from 65% to over 80% in the course of a month (Levada-Center 2015a), influential artists such as esteemed writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya, the popular Soviet rocker Andrei Makarevich, and creator of the beloved TV show Puppets (*Kukly*), Victor Shendevrovich, voiced their views against the Russian president's policies (Novaya Gazeta 2014; The Economist 2014). Most of these outspoken artists declared their opposition to these the annexation of Crimea in a letter published in *Novaya Gazeta* on March 13. This letter was written as a response to a show of support by other members of the creative class who, unlike the blacklisted, voiced their support for the annexation of Crimea. This show of support for the Putin regime occurred on March 11, when the Russian Ministry of Culture published a list of 511 names of

celebrities, artists, and curators of the arts who supported Putin's position towards protecting Russian interests in Ukraine and Crimea. This petition included the directors of the State Literary Museum and the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts Dmitri Bak and Irina Antanova, People's Artist of Russia and recipient of State Prize of the Russian Federation actor Sergei Bezrukov, and two-time State Prize recipient and Director General of Europe's oldest and largest film studio, *Mosfilm*, Karen Shakhnazarov (Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation 2014). As represented by this small sample of names and their achievements selected from hundreds, this list was largely comprised of artists who owed much of their funding and accolade to the State.

Two days after the publication of this pro-Putin petition, *Novaya Gazeta* published their anti-annexation appeal. Unlike the petition of the Ministry of Culture, the artists listed in *Novaya Gazeta* strongly opposed the president's Ukrainian policy and the annexation of Crimea. This list included a wide variety of academics, politicians, and celebrities including those previously mentioned: Andrei Makarevich, Lyudmila Ulitskaya, and Victor Shenderovich (Novaya Gazeta 2014). By including their names on this petition, these artists put their reputations and careers in jeopardy. In an article published a month after these pair of petitions, *The Economist* wrote "state-controlled media creates an illusion of uniformity of thought. Many are scared to voice their opinions not because they may be punished, but because they may be isolated" (The Economist 2014). At that time, President Putin labelled every dissenter as a "fifth columnist" and "national traitor" (The Economist 2014). By branding those who

disagreed with the state's policy towards Russian military intervention in Ukraine as "national traitor(s)," Putin linked support of the blacklist effect to nationalistic sentiment, a force that continues to be strong in Russia following the annexation of Crimea as demonstrated by a Levada-Center Poll that showed strong support for the slogan "Krymnash!" (Crimea is Ours!), which denotes pride in Russia and Putin's annexation of Crimea (Levada-Tsentr 2015c).

By appealing to patriotism and defense of Russia, Putin has connected the conflict in Crimea with World War II, a war that remains a strong source of pride and a reminder of sacrifice for the collective in much of the Russian population (Kazan Federal University 2015; Russia Today 2015; Sukhov 2015). By connecting the past with the present, Putin has shielded his approval ratings which, as explained previously, rely so much on societal acceptance of the conflict in Ukraine as a defensive war against the United States instead of an aggressive invasion. In order to maintain the predominance of this narrative, the State attempts to transform blacklisted artists into social pariahs. This phenomenon, the blacklist effect, exists for one primary reason: to protect presidential approval ratings by limiting the spread of dissenting views on the conflict in Ukraine that do not align with state interests.

IN-DEPTH STUDY OF BLACKLISTED

In order to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the blacklist effect in the cultural realm I will now detail how the blacklist effect surfaces in the lives of three of its most famous cases, each of whom represent a different domain of Russian culture: rock

musician Andrei Makarevich, award-winning novelist Lyudmila Ulitskaya, and popular satirist Victor Shenderovich. Because of their level of fame, the problems resulting from these artists' stance on the war in Ukraine is much more widely covered in the press, allowing me to gather examples that evidence the blacklist effect. These three blacklisted have also been some of the most active in voicing their opposition to Russian military intervention in Crimea and Ukraine, all three being signatories of the original petition of March 13, which signaled the beginning of this phase in the Culture War. By detailing the great magnitude of problems that began to emerge in the lives of these blacklisted following the publication of this petition, I will now demonstrate that the blacklist effect is governmentally initiated, but supported by members of the populace who, agreeing with the Kremlin and the version of events in Ukraine broadcasted by state-controlled television, view these celebrities as traitors.

Blacklisted in Music: Andrei Makarevich

Andrei Makarevich, founder, singer and guitarist of Russia's oldest still-active rock band Time Machine (*Mashina Vremeni*), is one of the most famous artists on the blacklist. Sometimes referred to as the "Russian Paul McCartney," Makarevich and his band are considered pioneers of Soviet rock music. After founding Time Machine in 1969, Makarevich made a career out of making music that fused different genres including classic rock, blues, and Russian folk music. He was named an Honored Artist of the RSFSP in 1991 and a People's Artist of Russia in 1999, an honor that was later

revoked by Putin in 2012 after Makarevich penned a song about governmental corruption (Forbes 2012).

While in recent years the lead singer of Time Machine has received a lot of negative press for his opposition to Putin's regime. However, as represented by his state awards, he was actually favored by many top members of the government in the past. In 2003, when the actual former Beatle Paul McCartney performed on Red Square, the state extended an invitation for Makarevich to attend. During the concert he sat next to and shared pleasantries with no other than President Putin (Marson 2014). Later that same year, Putin awarded Makarevich with "Merits for the Fatherland" of the fourth degree for his "great contribution to musical arts" (Gazeta.ru 2003). In presenting Makarevich with his award the president declared, "The songs of the legendary Time Machine – filled with the spirit of freedom, sincere, bright –became a real discovery and in many ways defined the ideals of several generations" (Gazeta.ru 2003).

The Russian president's opinion of the legendary Makarevich has worsened drastically from that time, which in the rocker's opinion, has led to the national press attempting to ruin his reputation. In August of 2014, Makarevich demanded that the president put a stop to the smear campaign against his reputation. Earlier that month, a story surfaced that Makarevich was performing in Slavyansk for a crowd of Ukrainian security forces. The performer responded that the conservative press was spreading lies; he performed only in the city of Svyatogorsk for children of refugees of Donetsk and

Lugansk (BBC News 2014a). In a direct address to Putin, the famous front man said, "Mr. President, I urge you to stop this orgy of discrediting my name" (Volodin 2014).

Putin enlisted accomplices who also had their hand in ruining Makarevich's image. "Andrei Makarevich has collaborated with fascists for a long time," United Russia party MP Evgeny Fedorov stated after news spread of Makarevich's concert in Svyatogorsk. Following the concert, Fedorov pushed legislation to have anyone who betrayed their motherland to be stripped of their state awards (BBC News 2014c). On *Rossiya 1*, one of Russia's largest state-run news channels, film director and firm Putin supporter Nikita Mikhalkov claimed that Makarevich's concert would be the equivalent to Klavdiya Shulzhenko, a prominent Soviet singer famous for her performances for Soviet soldiers in besieged Leningrad and elsewhere, giving a performance for Nazi-occupied Minsk during World War II (BBC News 2014c). In other words, Makarevich was a traitor, and one of the worst kind given his iconic status and history of state service.

Losing his good name is not the only negative effect that the blacklist is having on the legendary rocker's life. Makarevich, like many on the blacklist, has been forced into increasingly smaller venues. Where he and his band used to fill entire stadiums with fans, the rock legend now has difficulties being booked in small cafes. Citing reasons ranging from not having enough room to accommodate all of Makarevich's equipment to claiming the need for "vital repair work," Time Machine has seen their concerts cancelled across Russia (Hozhateleva 2014). "If the guy who makes the concert is not so brave, and

usually they are not because they want to live and feed their children, then the concert is stopped," the silver-haired rocker told BBC (Rainsford 2014).

Despite the stiff opposition, the singer has not been silenced in his support for Ukraine. In response to the rocker's endorsement of Ukrainian independence, in July of 2015, the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture named the rocker to their "White List." Kiev, unlike Moscow, maintains official Black and White Lists. Many of those favored by the Russian government find their names listed on the Black List in Kiev, while a good number of Russian blacklisted artists' names can be found on the Ukrainian White List. The Ministry of Culture of Ukraine cited the following reason for establishing their White List, "[c]reating a 'White List' is a sign of gratitude and respect to those foreign nationals who are not afraid to stand on the side of truth, justice, and simple human conscience" (BBC News 2015a). With his status as a Ukrainian "whitelisted," Makarevich has been able to make up for some of his cancelled performances in Russia with concerts in Ukrainian cities. In a 2015 interview, members of Time Machine stated, "[a]ll artists go where they are invited (…) We were invited to Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, and Dnipropetrovsk" (NTV 2015). Because they are not able to hold regular concerts in Russia due to repression initiated by the authorities, Makarevich and other blacklisted musicians are forced to perform where they are wanted, Ukraine. The state-sponsored and state-influenced media uses this current state of affairs to serve as further proof that artists such as Makarevich are loyal to Ukraine and traitors to Russia (Russia Today 2014).

Blacklisted in Literature: Lyudmila Ulitskaya

One of the biggest names in contemporary Russian literature, Lyudmila Ulitskaya, is one whose literary career has been among the most publicly impacted because of her opposition to the government. Ulitskaya grew up and lived much of her adult life in the Soviet Union, a country that banned many books that did not conform to Socialist ideology, and whose publishing houses released only a handful of carefully selected, government-approved titles. Many of the writers at the time relied on *samizdat,* or illegal self-publishing that relied on retyping copies on unregistered typewriters or writing them by hand which, if carbon paper was used, produced at most, three or four copies at a time. Spending most of her young adult life as a student and later a scientist, Ulitskaya herself was once arrested for attempting to create and distribute a *samizdat* novel, an underground translation of Leon Uris's "Exodus" (Gessen 2014). Although she lost her job as a result of her arrest, her punishment was minor and the future writer remained in jail for less than twenty-four hours (Gessen 2014).

After Gorbachev announced *glasnost* and *perestroika,* governmental reforms aimed at restructuring the government and making its policies more transparent, Ulitskaya began to write short stories. In 1990, about a year before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ulitskaya published her first piece of short fiction in a magazine called "*Ogonyok"* ("Little Flame"). After a few more publications and compiling her first short story collection, Ulitskaya wrote a novel entitled *Sonechka* which was short-listed for the Russian Booker Prize in 1993 and garnered her the Prix Médicis Étranger in 1996 (Gessen 2014). From there, the talented writer went on to win the Booker Prize in 2002

with her novel *Kukotsky Case*, the Russian Big Book (*Bolshaya Kniga*) prize in 2007, the Austrian State Prize for European Literature in 2014, and was even named an Officer of the Legion of Honor, the highest decoration in France (ELKOST Intl. Literary Agency 2015).

Although known for her short stories and longer novels, Ulitskaya has also been active in voicing her opinions on social issues. In recent times, this has taken the form of the writer's active role in the Snow Revolution and in the current movement against Russia's involvement in the conflict in Ukraine. She was one of the main organizers of the first session of the congress "[a]gainst war, against the isolation of Russia, and against the restoration of totalitarianism" (Novaya Gazeta 2014). Members of this anti-war congress were the ones to pen the reactionary petition of March 13, which sparked this newest stage of the Culture War in Russia. Regarding the conflict in Ukraine, the author stated in a March 2014 interview with *Ukrainian Pravda,* "[i]n this war, no one can win" (Slavinskaya 2014). In April of that same year, during the "Ukraine-Russia: dialogue," a meeting held in Kiev with the hope of starting a dialogue between the two nations embroiled in conflict, Ulitskaya is quoted as saying, "[t]he inner politics of Russia is turning it into a country of barbarians" (Tischenko 2014). As demonstrated by these quotes, the writer has voiced ideas that many others of the cultural elite would not dare to. This fact was perhaps best demonstrated in a 2011 interview with *The Guardian* where Ulitskaya commented on the arrest of Khodorkovsky. In this interview, the celebrated novelist claimed that she was not afraid of Vladimir Putin, going so far as to

label the leader of the Russian Federation "a joke" (Day 2011). While she has suffered in her own way from the blacklist effect, this internationally successful author apparently does not feel threatened by the current regime perhaps in part due to her high number of international book sales. Because of these sales, Ulitskaya, unlike many other blacklisted, does not have to rely on Russian audiences to maintain her livelihood. However, although she is in a sense more protected than other members of the cultural elite who oppose the government, her opposition has come with its own form of backlash, one example occurring in 2014 after Ulitskaya penned an open letter to the Russian government in opposition to the anti-gay propaganda law enacted in 2013. Following the publication of this letter in *The Guardian*, Ulitskaya found the publishing of one of her works being halted under investigation of the book as "gay propaganda" (Walker 2014). As of December 2015, this book is still yet to be published (Eksmo.ru n.d.).

In addition to running into unforeseen problems with publishing her works, Ulitskaya has had some problems with the details of staging her plays due to her political views. In November of 2014, Moscow stage actor Alexander Borisov refused to act in the play *Russian Jam* written by Ulitskaya. Borisov voiced his support for New Russia, the confederation of pro-Russian states in Eastern Ukraine which seceded from Ukraine prompting armed conflict between Ukrainian and separatist forces. After a trip to Donetsk, Borisov determined that he could not act in Ulitskaya's play because of her support for the Kievan government, the young actor going so far as to label her a "Russophobe militant" (Medvedeva 2015).

As is obvious from this quote, Borisov refused to participate in Ulitskaya's play because of his strong nationalist views and his perception, shared with many of Russian society, of the Russian author as a traitor to her nation, a view that Ulitskaya addressed in an interview with the television station *TV Dozhd*. After being asked who the national traitors of Russia were, Ulitskaya replied, "[i]t's us, probably. Understand that unfortunately, (…) today's situation in the zone of disseminating ideologies, it is unfortunately copying the history of the beginning of the Third Reich" (Makeeva 2014). Due to the base of high nationalistic fervor in the nation, a base that the Kremlin develops and exploits, citizens like Borisov show their support of the regime by refusing to support blacklisted artists' works and public appearances. In Borisov's case, his show of support of Putin came in the form of vehemently refusing to perform in Ulitskaya's play. Although this occurrence only affected Ulitskaya's work in a minor way (the managers were forced to find a willing actor to perform), this case serves as evidence for the larger phenomenon of Russian citizens responding to State-driven propaganda in painting artists who voice opposition to Russian involvement in Ukraine as traitors. In addition to broadcasting negative views about these artists on state-sponsored television, authorities find other, more direct, ways to meddle in the lives of blacklisted as happened to Ulitskaya in the fall of 2014.

In a similar manner to the way Makarevich has seen the bookings for his concerts removed, Ulitskaya has had conferences and scheduled appearances cancelled. In August 2014, the novelist was en route to a scheduled press conference with the central

government news agency ITAR-TASS. However, on the way to the event, she was notified that the conference was cancelled due to a pipe bursting in the hall where the meeting with journalists was scheduled to take place. Ulitskaya believed that the cancellation was due to her writing the piece "Evropa Proshai!" (Goodbye Europe!) which had been published only days earlier in one of the sole remaining newspapers that publish the blacklisted's editorials, *Novaya Gazeta*. This particular article described the writer's view that Russia was once again distancing itself from Europe, unlikely to ever integrate into the region (Radio Svoboda 2014). Although these instances are small in scale compared to the effects other blacklisted such as Makarevich have felt due to the blacklist, they all the same demonstrate the reach of the government in tampering with the lives and the careers of those that speak out against the regime.

In the beginning of a conversation between Ulitskaya and Denis Gutsko published by *Novaya Gazeta* at the end of 2015, the popular short-story writer commented on the motivation for members of the creative class to side with the government. Ulitskaya began by saying that she did not wish to speak ill towards Dmitriy Bak or Pavel Lungin, two members of the cultural elite and signers of the petition supporting Putin's annexation of Crimea. In the interview, Ulitskaya states, "It seems to me that a person who depends on budgetary money, controlling a theatrical collective or busy with work in charitable funds (such as Bak and Lungin), are strongly reliant on the government." She continues, "(when in such a position) sometimes you must put your signatures under such documents, which you would not have signed if you hadn't been in such a vulnerable

position" (Gutsko 2014). Through this statement, Ulitskaya alludes to her belief that many of those who voice support for the government do so only to secure their jobs and livelihoods as workers for state-funded organizations. In the same way that venue owners cancelled Makarevich's shows due to fear of the penalties for noncompliance as the rocker stated in a previously cited interview, Ulitskaya believes that many members of the creative class who publicly support the regime do so against their true beliefs in order to maintain their comfortable lifestyles.

In her piece for *The New Yorker*, famous political activist and writer Masha Gessen wrote the following about Ulitskaya, "she, along with a handful of other writers and a couple of musicians, had been branded a traitor for her opposition to the war in Ukraine." Gessen continues, "The musicians in the group have had their concerts cancelled all over the country. The writer's punishment may be slower in coming." In the conclusion of the *New Yorker* article, Ulitskaya compares herself to Little Red Riding Hood stating that, "I'll be eaten before it's all over." After a pause, she continues, "But maybe I won't live long enough to see that happen" (Gessen 2014).

Blacklisted in Radio/Television: Victor Shenderovich

Victor Shenderovich is a popular Russian scriptwriter, satirist, writer, and radio host. He made a name for himself as the scriptwriter for the popular satirical political puppet show, Puppets (*Kukly*), which ran from 1994 to 2002 on NTV before the network's governmental takeover referenced earlier in this paper. In this weekly Russian TV show, large, often wacky-looking puppets portraying political figures and celebrities

appeared on screen performing sketches that were often pointed and topical thanks to the writing of Shenderovich (Bevza 2013). The popular satirist thinks that Putin took personal insult to one particular episode of the show, "Kroshka Tsakhes," which shared its name with a German fairy tale popular in Russia (Chibizov 2013; Shenderovich 2005). In the episode Shenderovich references, a puppet resembling the Russian President is portrayed as an extremely ugly dwarf. Peter Baker and Susan Glasser describe the episode in their book *Kremlin Rising*: "[o]ne episode of *Kukly* that particularly aroused his (Putin's) wrath showed an ugly dwarf encountering a kind witch who runs a magic comb through his hair, and suddenly everyone starts to see him as beautiful, even though he has not changed at all." They then make clear whom the episode mocked: "[t]he dwarf was Putin and the witch was Berezovsky (head of Channel 1)" (Baker and Glasser 2005, 93). Shortly after the airing of this episode, NTV was ordered to remove Putin's face from *Kukly*. Even though the president's face did not appear on the show again, Shenderovich continued to mock the president and the administration, once portraying him as a (faceless) burning bush. Within a year of this initial warning, the offices of NTV were raided by the government, ownership placed into the hands of a Kremlin-backed banker, and the show *Kukly* was shut down (Baker and Glasser 2005, 93-98). "A show mocking politicians and in particular Putin had become too popular and garnered too much attention from the populace." For this reason, Shenderovich explains, it was taken off of the air by the political regime (Shenderovich 2005).

The loss of his show did not slow Shenderovich down for long. In the years following Puppets, Shenderovich has found success as a writer for *The New Times,* a liberal Russian news weekly and as a radio host for *Ekho Moskvy,* a station described as one of the last remaining bastions of free media by members of Western press (Remnick 2008). He has used his status as a popular media personality to publicize his criticisms of Putin and governmental policy. As he has been criticizing Putin for long over a decade, Shenderovich is one of the original blacklisted whose animosity from the government long predates the annexation of Crimea.

This ill will from the state has led to some alarming, albeit interesting, results. In 2010, Shenderovich was involved in the "honey trap" sex scandal. The popular satirist was accused of having extramarital affairs with a governmentally planted spy. The girl, known only by her first name Katya and her nickname "Moomoo," had affairs with a number of Russian oppositional leaders including Dmitriy Orishkin, Ilya Yashin, and Mikhail Fishman, editor of Russia's *Newsweek*. Using her good looks, offers of sex, and occasionally illegal drugs to lure these men to her apartment, Katya would engage the men in sexual intercourse, recording the affair with cameras and bugs placed within her flat. This was all done in an effort to discredit the Russian opposition by portraying them as scum without morals. The married Shenderovich was recorded having sex with Katya, a young woman noted for being the age of his only daughter. While this would be a vulnerable position to be put in for many, Shenderovich blew the whole situation off, writing on his blog, "I possessed Katya without any particular enjoyment. (…) In the

process, my colleague was boring, like all you vile Gestapovites" (Ioffe 2010). Shenderovich's wife subsequently forgave him with she and his daughter laughing off the whole affair. As opposition leader Ilya Yashin explains, "It's a reason for impeachment in America. Here it's 'big props.' Even when they see Shenderovich in this tape, they say, 'Not bad! The guy's already 70 and he's so energetic!" (Ioffe 2010). Although this particular allegedly Kremlin-backed scandal did little to hurt Shenderovich's image, it is not the only way authorities have tried to damage the satirist's reputation.

After signing the March 13 petition and taking his side on the annexation of Crimea against the government, Shenderovich used his status as a celebrity unafraid to speak out in opposition to the Putin administration to become one of the main voices in opposition to Russian involvement in the war in Ukraine. In August of 2014, the Russian writer and radio personality held a one-man picket protest on downtown Tverskaya Street of Moscow holding a sign that read "War with Ukraine –disgrace and crime" (Human Rights in Ukraine 2014). On the same week of this show of defiance, NTV, Shenderovich's one-time employer, broadcasted a segment entitled "13 Friends of the Junta" with a follow-up report called "17 More Friends of the Junta" which painted blacklisted such as Makarevich, Noize-MC, and Shenderovich as traitors and Nazi sympathizers (Peleschuk 2014). On the broadcast, political scientist Aleksei Martiynov says that Shenderovich and others like him have exhausted their creative potential, and lend their name to whatever cause pays the most money. "This approach is of the so-called 'cynical professional' who for five-hundred thousand rubles, is ready to support

any cause," the NTV "expert" says, "this is not professional, it's not even cultural work, it's what some may can be called… prostitution" (NTV 2014). Despite falling for the con of a governmentally hired prostitute and being called a prostitute by NTV, Shenderovich continues to publish and remains one of the primary voices in the opposition to war in Ukraine in the cultural sphere.

In addition to be labeled a "bastard" by the director of *Russia Today,* Dmitriy Kiselyov, in what has become a common pattern in the lives of many blacklisted, the creator of Puppets has cited difficulty in touring and advertising for his appearances in Russia (Shenderovich 2015b) In addition, the presentation of his new children's book was banned in Volgograd in early 2015 (Shenderovich 2015a). After scheduling an autograph session and meeting with readers, the curator of the gallery where the event was scheduled in Volgograd cancelled on Shenderovich. This cancellation included an art exhibit of Shenderovich's book illustrator scheduled in the same gallery. In the apology letter to the satirist, the curator, Marina Strukova, stated that everything had happened "very suddenly, but categorically" (Shenderovich 2015a). In his article on the matter, Shenderovich wrote that for fifteen years, since the start of Putin's rule, he has suffered from event cancellations. The satirist writes, "I carefully write down cases of 'cancellations': performances, parties, lectures, concerts ... I collect the wording of failures - from blunt breakthrough pipes and roof collapse to the diplomatic: [reasons citing that places and events such as] tea, MGIMO, and every type of housing office 'is not an appropriate audience'"(Shenderovich 2015a). It seems that just as in the examples

of Makarevich and Ulitskaya, many venues cancelling on blacklisted do so for reasons of facilities in need of repairs and faulty plumbing. These excuses suggest that not all is what it seems on the surface. Either as a sign of support or fear of the state, venue owners likely responding to pressure from direct contact from state-sponsored press or authorities as alluded to by Makarevich, continue to repeat similar, clichéd excuses as they cancel blacklisted artists' appearances, thereby restricting these artists access to the public.

Aside from these cancellations, the satirist has also been faced with more quantifiable financial repercussions after voicing his negative views on government officials. In April 2014, less than a month after the radio personality signed the anti-Crimean annexation appeal, Vladimir Vasiliyev, the head of United Russia faction of the State Duma (the political party affiliated with President Putin,) sued the satirist for defamation of character after the radio personality had described Vasiliyev and his associates as "scoundrels" during a radio interview with *Ekho Moskvy* which addressed an article Shenderovich wrote comparing the Sochi Olympics to Hitler's Olympics held in Nazi Germany. In this radio broadcast about the Olympics article, the satirical writer said, "[i]f I lived in a democratic nation, I would quit working today and live off of the fees from these villains and the huge number of Vasilyev's scoundrels in the State Duma" (BBC News 2014b). After this broadcast aired, Vladimir Vasiliyev, part of the group of Putin's associates that Shenderovich referred to as "scoundrels," demanded a public apology from the television writer and after originally suggesting a fine of three million, finally settled with the courts for one million rubles from the satirist. Although

Shenderovich and the head of *Ekho Moskviy* both refused to apologize, the satirist was eventually forced by the courts to pay Vasiliyev and United Russia the one million rubles (BBC News 2014b). According to Shenderovich, he was not given proper advanced notice and the trial was conducted on a day when he was out of the country (Shenderovich 2014). In the *Ekho Moskviy* blog post published on this topic, Shenderovich writes, "[t]he Putin system – authoritarian, rhetoric, patriotic – the population is divided into the 'grateful' and 'national traitors' and minor disturbances such as the Constitution and the law in general – does not interfere at all with the triumph of the winners" (Shenderovich 2014). As is clear in all of the blacklisted artists' stories, the nation has been divided over the conflict in Ukraine; if you are not with Putin and his administration, you are against them, a fact that has led to all the repercussions detailed in this chapter.

CONCLUSION: CLAMPING DOWN ON CULTURE

In conclusion, Vladimir Putin and his administration employ a wide assortment of strategies in responding to dissent by cultural leaders of Russian society. By controlling television and thereby the populace's primary access to information, Putin is able to sway public opinion by allowing the publication of articles and reports that attack the opposition and praise the conflict in Ukraine while restricting those that portray Putin or Russian military intervention in Ukraine in a negative light. The head of the Russian state also uses governmental intimidation to restrict opportunities for blacklisted to appear publicly by threatening venue owners, and when necessary, having criminal and drug

authorities conduct raids during the artists' concerts as occurred with Makarevich and Noize MC. This tactic has been successful in having venue owners cancel these aforementioned blacklisted artists' shows. Governmental coercion and the occasional use of force has also succeeded in preventing blacklisted cultural elites' works from being brought before the public eye such as in the case of Ulitskaya's anthology labeled as "gay propaganda" and Shenderov's children's book. Even if not directly ordered by the government, members of the cultural elite and ordinary citizens who support the current regime continue to attack blacklisted in the public sphere, branding them just as the state-run television does, as fascist supporters and traitors to their country.

In these ways, celebrities who voice their criticism of the government and its policies put their reputations and careers in danger by doing so. Although affecting long-time blacklisted such as Shenderovich since the early stages of Putin's first presidential term, this Culture War is likely far from its conclusion. Just as the situations in Ukraine and Syria continue to develop, the Culture War will continue to evolve. Although currently serving to shield presidential approval ratings supported by a positive image on the conflict in Ukraine, as the political and cultural spheres become increasingly intertwined, the focus of this blacklist effect may shift, likely pulling more celebrities oppose governmental policy into this struggle between members of the creative class and the government. As demonstrated by the negative effects that voicing dissent against the Putin regime has had in current blacklisted artists' lives, popular figures in entertainment should be wary when stating their personal beliefs in public if they at all conflict with the

views of the government, especially when concerning the conflict in Ukraine. As artists' careers are halted and their reputations continue to be besmirched in the public eye, this stage in the Culture War is significant in that not only does it demonstrate the current administration's vulnerability concerning the conflict in Ukraine, but it shows above all that speech in contemporary Russian society is not entirely free—it comes with a price. This price continues to be paid by artists, such as Noize MC in today's Russia. It is to this young rapper that this thesis now turns.

Chapter 5: Noize MC vs. Timati—Rap Battling on a National Stage

Now that I have given a framework of the blacklist effect, let us turn back to the example of Noize MC. The young rapper's situation following his voicing support for Ukraine at the August 2014 Ukrainian music festival follows the same pattern of Makarevich's repression detailed in the last chapter: Noize MC's concerts were cancelled, his finances were affected, and his name was smeared across media. The blacklist effect began to have an impact on Noize MC in late 2014, a 19-year-old fan interviewed for a *Washington Post* article stated, "In Russia, we always have to have a guilty party." He then explains that Makarevich is this "symbol" for his parents' generation but "for us, it's Noize MC" (Demirjian 2014b).

On the other side of the political spectrum is Timur Yunusov, more popularly known by his rap name Timati. Having remained a staunch supporter of Putin since the President's 2012 reelection campaign, Timati demonstrates the good fortune an artist can have when he or she sides with the regime in power. Before I delve into the specifics of the case of Noize MC vs. Timati, I want to reiterate the reasons for choosing the genre of hip-hop as the ideal platform on which to observe the blacklist effect in the Russian cultural sphere.

HIP-HOP AND POLITICS

The introduction to this thesis offered a brief introduction to hip-hop and how the cultural form made its way into Russia. Although this thesis does dissect hip-hop in terms of its syntax, symbolism, and as a form of cultural appropriation in Russia, other works

such as Kathleen Feyh's doctoral dissertation *Russian Hip-Hop: Rhetoric at the Intersection of Style and Globalization* do much more of this dissection than I intend to. My research is primarily concerned with hip-hop in that it is the genre that provides an almost caricaturized view of the power of political repression in Russia today. Therefore, my main aim in this introductory section to this chapter on hip-hop's role in the blacklist effect is to demonstrate why hip-hop has become an unlikely target for Putin, a man who, when asked what his favorite type of music was, replied, "Russian music" (BBC News 2011).

So how has hip-hop become politicized? Hip-hop academic Halifu Osumare writes in her book on global hip-hop, "Hip-hop (…) has implicitly been political by virtue of its predominantly black cultural expression. From its initial marginal social status, it had the audacity to talk back to the American status quo in direct, insulting, and often obscene ways" (Osumare 2007, 7-8). As this quote demonstrates, hip-hop was political from its origin due to its social marginality stemming in part from it originally being a solely black form of cultural expression.

Chuck D of legendary rap group Public Enemy furthered this thought of hip-hop's implicit political power when he called rap "the CNN of young black Americans" (Bernard 1992). The noteworthy MC saw rap as the way teenagers from other parts of the country (and the globe) learn what struggles their peers are facing in cities like New York and Los Angeles. This "blackness" of rap was a major barrier to hip-hop finding

commercial success in Russia as detailed in chapter one with the example of Detsl. While Russians eventually managed to coopt the mode of cultural expression and make it their own, rap's long-term association with politics as a "voice for the voiceless" has not faded. James Bernard, former writer of the popular hip-hop magazine *Source* wrote this about hip-hop: "Where pop songs offer solace from an increasingly perplexing world, rap engages it (…) Rap is about being a witness: talking about [what] one sees, feels, and experiences." (Bernard 1992). Rap is a method of testament which transcends national boundaries and racial barriers. No higher proof of this exists than in the fact that the white, Russian Noize MC engages his predominately white, Russian audience in his political struggle against a corrupt system.

Before I attempt to disentangle the intricacies of Noize's struggle, I want to reiterate why this conflict, or "nationwide rap battle" as I frame it, is important to the survival of the Putin regime. As detailed in this paper's introductory chapter, the blacklist effect, and thus the suppression of artist's like Noize MC, is part of a campaign for Putin to cultivate negative soft power domestically. Negative soft power attempts to make a leader of a country more popular among domestic constituents by making other countries or alternative domestic leaders less attractive by comparison. As Eric Gordy wrote in his book on Serbia in the 1990s, Serbian authoritarian Slobodan Milosevic attempted a similar crusade of limiting alternatives through his support of pro-government turbo-folk artists. Jennifer Len also analyzed Milosevic's propping up of turbo-folk in her book *Banding Together*, defining the musical category as a "government-purposed genre,"

among those that "receive financial support from the government or oppositional groups with a direct interest in the ideological content of popular music" (Lena 2012). In the Serbian case, "[n]ot only did government authorities encourage and commission works in this genre; they also supported its production and dissemination. The substance of the music is so instrumental to regime objectives that it was used as a form of propaganda by the state" (Lena 2012).

While Lena treats musical genres in Serbia like monoliths, sorting them into their respective categories, I conceptualize genres in today's Russia as being divided internally. Although Noize MC uses his music as a weapon to resist the Putin regime, other parts of the Russian hip-hop community use rap to support the current government, in a similar manner to how Milosevic's turbo-folk acts functioned in Serbia. However, unlike Serbian turbo-folk, Russian rap is fractured. Three separate types of rappers have developed in Putin's Russia: apoliticals, propagandists (pro-Putin rappers), and blacklisted such as Noize MC.[12] The vast majority of hip-hoppers are apolitical. They avoid politics altogether by rapping about life, love, day-to-day hardships, drugs, partying, crime, and a wide host of other topics common to the genre. They can even rap about politics assuming that they do not denounce actions of the regime that are off-limits. For example, although Noize MC had been banned from appearing on Channel

[12] As one of the fathers of the field of propaganda in the United States, Edward Bernays, states in his influential work *Propaganda*, "'propaganda' carries to many minds an unpleasant connotation. Yet whether, in any instance, propaganda is good or bad depends upon the merit of the cause urged, and the correctness of the information published." While propaganda can be used to spread misinformation, at its best, propagation is the spreading of truth (Bernays 1928). I use the term "propagandists" here to describe the set of rappers that use their music to spread (or propagate) messages of the Putin regime.

One after his penning the song "Mercedes 666," exposing police corruption connected to a traffic accident involving an executive of the state-controlled LUKOil company, his concerts were not banned across Russia until he showed his support for Ukraine. As the existence of these distinct groups in Russian hip-hop show, the genre as a whole does not conform to Lena's definition of a government-purposed genre; however, the pro-government faction of hip-hop, those who show their staunch support for Putin in their songs and interviews, do serve as a government-purposed faction within the hip-hop genre. This government-purposed faction is led by Timati and his label Blackstar Entertainment who often refer to themselves as the "Black Star Mafia." It is to them this chapter now turns.

HIP-HOP PROPAGANDISTS

Blackstar Entertainment's "About Us" page on their website states that they are a "leader in the domestic market in terms of the ratio of number of hits to songs produced" (Blackstar Entertainment 2016). By using this oddly specific measure of success meant to denote the premium quality of their music, they sell themselves short. They are one of the top labels in all of Russia, whatever your standards of success might be—they routinely rack up millions of views on each of their many YouTube videos, have a list of artists including Timati, Egor Krid, and L'One that dominate the top charts in hip-hop and R&B, and have recently expanded their franchise to include multiple business including a tattoo parlor in central Moscow and Black Star Burger, a burger restaurant on Noviy Arbat, a street in Moscow with one of the highest rates of foot traffic in the country.

"More than music. [We are a] style of life," (Blackstar Entertainment 2016) Blackstar claims a little further down their "About Us" page. Although likely meant to reference their sprawling businesses empire outside of the music industry as well as their encompassing musical genres outside of hip-hop, this vague line on their website also refers to their staunch loyalty to the Kremlin and the lifestyle choices that this loyalty implicitly includes. The contract for all musicians who sign with Blackstar Entertainment includes a clause stipulating that the artist will abide by the governmentally-sponsored "propaganda for a healthy lifestyle" known by its Russian acronym ZOZH (propaganda Zdorovogo Obraza ZHizni).[13] Unlike their close American equivalent in terms of record sales and overall alternative image, Cash Money Records, which sponsors artists who openly flaunt their drug use, artists of Blackstar Entertainment, by signing their contract that includes this clause, agree to remain abstinent from narcotics and not partake alcohol in excess (Goldman 2016). To further this image of a healthy and civic-minded hip-hop collective, Timati has built community outdoor exercise facilities across Moscow (Belov and Super 2016). In a 2016 interview with *Gazeta* (Newspaper), Timati claimed "Sport – is our everything, sport – is our character, sport – is our endurance." Then in a blatant propagation of the Kremlin's stance, "Exercise, cultivate sport in all of your loved ones,

[13] As described in an earlier footnote, propaganda is simply the spreading of a message. Putin's propaganda for a healthy lifestyle seeks to promote healthy choices within Russian society. The Soviet government also used propaganda to promote health and hygiene in their populace. Tricia Starks, in her book on Soviet health propaganda, writes, "[h]ealth was of immediate, vital importance to the new state for political stability, productive industry, and military manpower, but revolutionaries characterized health programs as necessary for more than mere survival. Caring for the population was a duty" (Starks 2008). From the very beginning of the Soviet period and until its end, Soviets disseminated messages for a healthy lifestyle in order to reform the public and improve the nation as a whole (Starks 2008). Following the Soviet tradition of health propaganda, Putin and his supporters such as Timati spread messages promoting a population that exercises and abstains from narcotics and alcohol.

friends and relatives. We are together with sport one hundred percent" (Goldman 2016).

In the same way that t.A.T.u could both coopt the LGBT identity while staunchly supporting the Putin regime, members of the "Blackstar Mafia" straddle the divide between the government and ZOZH. In 2014, L'One, one of Blackstar's most popular artists, released the song "Mister Heisenberg," referencing the drug lord Walter White (nicknamed Heisenberg) from the hit American TV show, *Breaking Bad*. Donning a biohazard suit and mask like the meth cookers who make the narcotic in the show, L'One raps, "Eight barrels of weed would not break me. The dirtier it is, the bigger the bang!" (BlackStarTV 2014). When questioned about this song and its drug implications that seemingly violated the ZOZH clause included in his contract with Blackstar, L'One claimed, "I do not cook methamphetamine like Walter White. I cook lyrics and beats. It is a metaphor and there is not violation of the rules here" (Trunov 2014).

Although most of the lyrics in his song could take either meaning, supporting L'One's claim that there is no direct violation of ZOZH in the song, one line in particular disputes this notion: "Cooking chemicals, my demons are with me; Moscow – a huge market, bigger than Albuquerque" (BlackStarTV 2014). Because he explicitly states that he is cooking chemicals (and not lyrics nor beats), this lyric is a direct violation of ZOZH in that L'One is propagating an unhealthy, drug-fuelled lifestyle. What was the result of L'One's violation of ZOZH–absolutely nothing. It is doubtful that Putin would approve of such a video as "Mister Heisenberg," but the Russian government's head has much

bigger concerns to deal with—as long as Blackstar does their part in voicing their support for Kremlin policies (such as L'One did by tweeting a picture of him holding a sign reading "Kadyrov is a patriot"), they are allowed to conduct their business as they see fit, even if the music label's content is not 100% in fitting with government policies. Putin has his governmentally sponsored rappers who are successful in counteracting hip-hop acts that seek to subvert the Russian President's influence, such as Noize MC, and that is all with which the Kremlin is concerned.

Mr. Black Star: Timati

Timati, the former background dancer and collaborator for Detsl, has seen hip-hop change over the years since its arrival in Russia. He should be praised for his efforts in constructing a truly "Russian" version of hip-hop that connected with his Tartar roots. He commented on this aspect of his music saying, "I was accused of stealing a lot from Americans and having nothing of my own. I answered this with lezginka (folk dances originating from the Caucasus Mountains), taking hip-hop beats and adding our ethnic elements to it" (Belov and Super 2016). This accusation of stealing from foreigners obviously struck a tender chord in the Blackstar Mafia Don. Having spent part of his childhood in the United States, Timati is one of the most internationally successful Russian hip-hop artists, having rapped multiple songs (in English) featuring high-profile rap superstars including P. Diddy, Flo Rida, and Snoop Dogg. Emphasizing his dedication to ZOZH, Timati proudly emphasized in a later interview that Snoop claimed he was the only person who had refused to smoke marijuana with him (Belov and Super

2016).

While his international success furthered Timati's rap career in Russia, he eventually felt pressured to decide between the West and his native homeland. After hearing many fans conversing in English at a concert he says, "And there I took thought hard: if I aspire to the West, I need to leave. But then I decided that I live in Russia and I will work for my country" (Belov and Super 2016). If "working for [his] country" entailed serving his government, Timati certainly kept to his decision. Although he was barred from serving in the military due to the numerous tattoos that cover his body, Timati has done everything in his power to show his support for his government, and President Putin in particular. He has stated in numerous interviews, his reasons for his close ties to the Russian President, which led the MC to record a message of support for Putin's 2012 reelection campaign: "I was not a patriot. I looked at everything in a negative light: everything here is bad, and in America people earn money. Then I saw what Putin is doing, I saw his changes taking place in my city – Moscow." Timati said it struck a personal note with him, "I had turned thirty-three, and my daughter was born. I started to feel a civic duty. I support the current order and do not hide it. I voted and will vote for Putin." In this same interview, Timati toes all the proper lines, denouncing gays as having a mental condition, calling gay parades "propaganda," and acknowledging his close friendship with the Chechen tyrant, Kadyrov (Belov and Super 2016).

The rapper's support for the Russian President produced a nationalist anthem

reminiscent of hymns such as "*I Vnov' Prodolzhaetsya Boj" ("The Battle Continues Again")* which glorifies Soviet leaders, albeit this time in a modern context and with a modern authoritarian. In October of 2015, in recognition of Putin's sixty-third birthday, Blackstar released *"Luchshij Drug" ("Best Friend")* featuring artists Sasha Chest and Timati. The video starts with an establishing shot of Red Square with the Kremlin featured prominently. Timati walks slowly towards the camera with an action-hero-styled strut. "My best friend is President Putin!" Timati says repeatedly as a close-up is made of his face, which is mirrored on either side of the screen. After introducing Sasha Chest, the beat drops and the aforementioned MC spits, "My white overlord! Who is of the left (opposition), there's the exit. These girls have asked for it–take your pick." The camera then cuts to youths in a BMX park donning Putin masks and shredding in an empty pool. They cut flips and tricks as Chest raps, "[e]verything is for him and freedom is like a river. We have the strength (…) we are all, the whole nation, behind him." As skateboarding teens join the BMXers in spreading tricolored smoke of the Russian flag throughout the park with smoke-producing flares, and while he raps in front of a mural sporting the President's face, Chest ends with "[y]ou knew, he is a badass superhero. Today I'm a player because my friend is with me. He's the boss, so all will go according to plan" (TimatiOfficial 2015).

After a brief pause in the music in which the scene changes into nightclub with a figure climbing to the stage, the scene gains tension. However, after the figure puts on a Putin mask, the beat drops and Timati starts his verse while riding on Red Square atop a

Russian-produced Lada shouting, "Russian products are once again affordable!" He continues, as the camera switches between Red Square and the nightclub, "[m]y friend is in the game again. My friend is one of us. If the country is a club, then the dancefloor has many people. No face control. Everyone here is equal." As the DJ in the Putin mask continues to mix the beat and breakdancers wearing Putin masks begin to dance on Red Square, Timati reminds the audience, "[e]verything else is decided by the DJ." With his verse coming to a close, Timati, donning a Putin mask himself and riding a jet ski in front of the business center of Moscow, as he points to the camera, ominously states, "[t]ell me who your best friend is, and I will tell you who you are." After flashing all of the images shown throughout the video once again, the last shot shows Timati walking away from the camera headed towards the Kremlin (TimatiOfficial 2015). Interestingly, throughout the course of the video, Putin has been associated with all four tenants of hip-hop: MCing, DJing, breaking, (Timati, the MC, donned a Putin mask as did the DJ and the breakdancers), and graffiti (Timati rapped in front of a new-age, hexagonal urban mural of the president's face). Just as Putin's appearance at *Battle for Respect 3* (organized by a current Blackstar executive) sought to achieve in 2009, this video made Putin "cool" and relatable to youths.

Although little needs to be done to uncover the video and song's strong, overt, nationalist and political themes, Timati still claimed in an interview following the release of the video that "[h]ip-hop was historically a rebellious and revolutionary genre because the rights of Blacks were suppressed. Today rappers graduate Harvard and do not rap

about politics, drugs, and murder" (Belov and Super 2016). This statement is misguided if not openly hypocritical considering not only did L'One glorify a meth dealer in "Mister Heisenberg" but also Timati's open praise bordering on idol-worship with "Best Friend." In fact, Timati's threat of, "[t]ell me who your best friend is, and I'll tell you who you are" coupled with Chest's, "[w]ho is of the left, there is the exit" demonstrate that the young rappers have gone beyond praising and have actually internalized Putin's strategy of limiting alternatives through suppression and intimidation of those that oppose them and their sponsor. Although Timati claimed in a 2016 GQ interview that his support for the Kremlin was not at all related to his desire to sell albums (Belov and Super 2016), it is impossible that Blackstar would have been able to record on a Red Square clear of pedestrians without government approval.

This support of the government has not come without its costs for Blackstar, however. In the same way that pro-Ukrainian artists like Noize MC are blacklisted in Russia, so, too, are Russian propagandists like Timati and artists of Blackstar blocked from performing in Ukraine. After performing concerts in Crimea, artists of Blackstar were each labelled "*persona non grata*" ("unwanted persons") and banned from entering the country for a period of three years. Egor Krid and L'One were unable to enter the country to perform and their concerts were subsequently cancelled (Barskaya 2016; Trunov 2014). Some Blackstar artists such as L'One claimed that music should exist outside of politics (even saying Noize MC should be left alone), and that they would be happy to return and perform in Ukraine (Trunov 2014). Contrasting L'One's forgiving

nature, when Kristina Si, the Blackstar songstress, was stopped by border security at a Ukrainian airport in November 2016, she asked the guards, "[d]o I look like someone who reads Ukrainian laws?" She followed the encounter by posting "God Bless Russia!" on her personal Twitter feed (KristinaSi 2016; "Ya pokhozha na tu, kotoraya chitaet zakoniy Ukrainiy?" - Kristina Si na kameru otvetila kievskim pogranichnikam 2016).

Ukraine's ban on artists went all the way to the top of the Blackstar chain of command. Likely expecting bans on venues in Kiev, Ukraine's capital, Timati booked shows for August 2015 in Odessa, a boat ride away from Russia's newest oblast' (federal body), Crimea. However, the governor of Odessa's oblast' and former President of Georgia during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, Mikhail Saakashvili, ordered the concert to be cancelled citing one of the reasons being Timati's close friendship with Ramzan Kadyrov, Head of the Chechen Republic. In Saakashvili's words, Kadyrov's arms "are to the elbow in blood of Ukrainians at Donbass." The former Georgian President also reminded the public that the same performer, Timati, had referred to Ukraine as a "little brother who had begun to drink and do drugs." In his rebuttal on Instagram, Timati, referencing an embarrassing incident caught on camera, told Saakashvili that "a real man does work and does not chew his tie." He thanked the people of Odessa for their love and support, and pronounced his love for the city and the people of Ukraine (Mamienko 2015). Although not likely to affect Timati, who is able to sell out stadiums in Moscow and Chechnya, the official governmental banning of pro-Putin Blackstar Entertainment across Ukraine shows the ties that the cultural and political spheres are connected with in

these warring countries of the former Soviet bloc.

HIP-HOP BLACKLISTED

As can be determined from the recent success of Blackstar Entertainment, as Russian markets are larger than those in Ukraine, rapping pro-Putin messages is more likely to help a rapper's career than taking an open anti-Putin stance. Using this tactic, rappers of the Architects Music Group (A.M.G.), knowing very little Russian and rapping completely in English, managed to finance a Russia-wide tour after their smash hit "Go Hard Like Vladimir Putin" was endorsed by a tweet from Timati (Architects Music Group (A.M.G) 2014; Kuvshinova 2015). On the other hand, artists who have decided to endorse the newly-elected Ukrainian government or the Ukrainian war effort against Russia, such as Kiev-based Boombox or Yarmak, have had their concerts cancelled in Russian cities and at venues in Ukrainian cities bordering Russia; authorities in St. Petersburg went so far as to tell Boombox to not bother scheduling further concerts in their city (korrespondent.net 2014; Kozub 2016; Stol'niyj Grad 2016). However, these acts had home crowds in Ukraine to rely on during hard times of concert cancellations in Russia—Noize MC did not. Instead of trying to compensate for lost Russian audiences with Ukrainian ones, the young Ivan Alekseev decided to fight back.

Making Too Much Noize: The Suppression of Ivan Alekseev

"Timati does not have any kind of future" Noize MC once said after Timati had waged war with Russian singer and cultural icon Filipp Kirkorov (yarcube.ru 2012). It is doubtful that the young rapper would say the same thing if asked about Mr. Black Star

today. In a sudden change in fortune, Timati finds himself among the most popular hip-hop acts in Russia while Alekseev still finds trouble securing concerts halls in remote regions in his home country. Although occasionally having concerts cancelled and even being arrested on one occasion in Volgograd after rapping about corruption in the police force (Belousov 2012; Kontsert Noize MC v Cheboksarakh zapretili "sverkhu" n.d.), Noize had never encountered such strong resistance from government officials as he did in Krasnoyarsk (central-Siberian city, around 2500 miles from Moscow) following hoisting the Ukrainian flag at the Ukrainian music festival.

In a 2015 interview, he describes the situation that he met when trying to perform in Krasnoyarsk: "I was simply in shock—how many people in uniform do you need to gather to prevent the performance of scary and terrifying Noize MC?" The rapper then further describes the incident: "[w]e were still in the car when seven policeman came to check our documents." He continues, "[t]hen we arrived at the club where we were supposed to perform and as it turned out, police had also come and banned our concert." It was not only a couple of officers who arrived to prevent Noize's concert. He states: "The club was in a multi-tiered building with a hotel and a few entertainment centers—on every floor stood two police officers." The police questioned every person at the venue. They then told the polarizing rap act that they also would not allow them to perform in Omsk, their next stop. When Noize MC tried to relocate to a nearby public square, the police arrived once again when the rapper was checking the area's acoustics, this time warning that if a concert took place, everyone in the group would be arrested. Noize ends

his story with "I do not know how many policemen you need to screw in a lightbulb, but to stop the performance of Noize MC — you need a whole lot, preferably with machine guns and a dog" (Boyarinov n.d.).

As this story demonstrates, it should be noted that Noize MC battled bravely against the authorities cancelling his concerts and repression from political authorities. After the Communist Party of the Russian Federation started a petition to get Noize's name on an official governmental blacklist, he released the song "Come $ome All! (Totalitarian Trap)," a clear jab at the Communists to anyone familiar with the titular Soviet organization, the Comsomol (Malakhova and Gasparyan 2014). In an interview held after one of his street concerts, a type of venue the young rapper had often used in his early career at a time when venues also refused to stage him albeit for different reasons, he had the following to say, "[i]t (recent ejections from venues) doesn't resemble real repression. I hope it doesn't come to that. We do what we should—we play our music. We perform for people through various means, and while we can still do it, we will." Despite being listed as one of the seventeen additional "friends of the junta" by *NTV*, in late 2014, Noize MC remained optimistic that the wave of repression would pass (Reer and Papakhova 2014).

Although basking somewhat in his status as the "Most Dangerous Rapper of the Russian Federation" due to his ongoing battle with authorities and continuing to perform "Tanzy," the song that he himself recognized (along with hoisting the Ukrainian flag) had caused all the trouble, it was clear that Alekseev was becoming increasingly frustrated

with his concert cancellations. After having his sound cut off in the middle of a concert while trying to explain the lack of Nazis in Ukraine (one of the Kremlin's favorite images to project through their television broadcasts), Noize MC left the stage only to return later in the middle of Russian rap group Anacondaz set, completely nude (Ivanova 2014). For this act, protestors gathered at his concert in Krasnodar. In the words of Noize, they were protesting for "[s]caring little children who are not sleeping at two in the morning, instead listening to curse-filled songs of naked people" (Boyarinov n.d.).

Although garnering mild success with his English-language raps on *Hard Reboot* completed attempts to cultivate an international audience, Noize MC continued having authorities cancel his concerts, a development negatively affecting his financial situation, a situation that threatened not only the rapper's well-being, but that of his wife and two sons. The continued cancellations likely influenced the young performer's attitude leading up to an interview he gave to *Dozhd* on April 8, 2015. In this interview, Noize claims a change of heart and expresses a measure of regret in his actions, "[y]ou understand, I just turned thirty, and I understood everything. Up to that point, I understood nothing. I do weird stuff, and people, confused about what I do, condemned me." He continues with, "[s]ome of them were very active and spread the message that I do not conduct myself well. Over time, it became known to the proper authorities, and now they are trying to make sure that I do not conduct myself in such a way." "But you know," Alekseev finishes, "I am at a serious age and I realized. I will now conduct myself well." It was clear that just as had happened to Zemfira months prior, the

repression of authorities had become too much for the young artist to bear. "This is the force of evil," Noize said. "They don't sleep. They are multi-faced and multi-tiered. You never know how they will appear" (TV Dozhd 2015).

For a time, things remained quiet in the battle between Noize and authorities. It truly seemed to this author that yet another light of the Russian culture, and the brightest among the younger generation of Russians, had been snuffed out. However, just as he had rebelled against the unfair parliamentary elections in the Snow Revolution of 2011-2012 (Batty 2011) so, too, did Noize pick up the fight against repression of his rights once again with his 2016 protest song *"Defend My Speech" ("Sokhrani Moyu Rech")*. As puppets with stenciled faces of historical Russian writers and dissidents shuffle about the scene, Noize requests, "[s]ave my speech forever (…) take it away under the noses of the coached bloodhounds, past the big-eyed officials in uniforms and the plainclothes demons, through the searches, deportations, arrests, and executions, all the way to the printing press." He denotes the broader significance beyond his personal struggle with Putin, "While you're there, they don't burn this manuscript. They do not take the fire or the stove; don't even save me. Save my speech" (Noize MC 2016).

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF SPEECH IN RUSSIA

"Putin will not go gentle into the night," Karen Dawisha, writer of *Putin's Kleptocracy*, states at the end of her book. "He shows himself to be less flexible and more bombastic in his public appearances, and those in his inner circle suggest that after the 2011-12 election demonstrations, there is also fear." As Putin has tried to prolong his stay

in power, he has had to rely on increasingly desperate and cold-blooded tactics. But why? What is Putin so afraid of? Why is it so important to him that he remain in power? In quoting Gleb Pavlovskiy, Putin's "PR guru for over a decade" Dawisha again writes, "Pavlovskiy says he heard Putin say, 'We know ourselves… we know that as soon as we move aside, you will destroy us. He said that directly, you'll put us to the wall and execute us. And we don't want to go to the wall.'" (Dawisha 2014, 349). In other words, Putin has made too many enemies during his long stretch as the leader of Russia. His two remaining options are to stay in power or die trying. So how important is the blacklist effect in all of this? Does a young rapper such as Noize MC really wield so much power that he could oust the long-term president with a show of defiance? The answer is no, but if one artist is allowed to revolt and others join him, a popular revolution could form as it did in 2011-2012. Even at that time, Putin had untold power with his influence in the FSB and his control of the media. However, the protests have been growing in size throughout Putin's time as president. It started with the hundred or so mothers of the *Kursk* sailors; it has most recently numbered in the hundreds of thousands during the Snow Revolution and the tens of thousands after opposition leader Boris Nemtsov's assassination in 2015. With the numbers of opposition growing in Russia, the next popular protest movement that Putin faces could very well be his last.

So do the existence of the blacklist effect and repression of artists like Noize MC show us that Putin fears a popular revolution? Yes, but it also shows us the extent of Putin's vast power network. Where did the blacklist effect come from? Legendary

Russian music critic Artemy Troitsky commented on his fellow blacklisted Makarevich, Zemfira, and Noize MC when he said, "The impulse to target pop culture most probably came directly from Putin, and then like a domino effect, people tried to follow this party line to show how loyal and how patriotic they are." As the evidence demonstrates, the blacklist effect certainly came from someone very high up on the command chain, likely President Putin himself. This top-down "impulse" then began to work its way from the bottom, up as ordinary citizens and local authorities reacted to the wishes of the government. The scary part about this is what Troitsky says next, "But after this first impulse has been given, I don't think Putin really cares that much. He's got more important things on his agenda" (Demirjian 2014a). In other words, one whim of Putin can have serious prolonged effects across an entire class of Russians, this time targeting the cultural elite. One word from Putin and the entire system carries out his bidding, as people across the country carry out his wishes, recoiling from the possibility of punishment. The hope for people like Noize as well as the fear of Putin is the possibility of one day ordinary members of society refusing to react as the Russian President wills them to. Although nationalism has fueled the president's popularity ratings to an absurd level around 85% following the Crimean Annexation, things cannot remain as they are forever. Just as Soviet citizens grew tired of the never-ending economic hardship taken on in resisting the West during the Cold War, so, too, will today's Russians.

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